

The role that boarding and independent schools can play in improving the attainment and outcomes of care-experienced young people

The Independent Review into Social Care

"If private education exists then it should be equally accessed by those who face the greatest educational obstacles. Local Authorities should be better equipped to identify children likely to thrive in these settings, and to consider how they can better leverage the opportunities that state and independent boarding schools offer....

"... The DfE has funded a programme to explore if more central coordination can support better identification, matching and placing of children into independent boarding and day schools, and the results thus far have been positive - demonstrating an appetite from the independent sector as well as widening the pool of children in care accessing the opportunities.. "

What is the Broadening Education Pathways Scheme?

The Broadening Education Pathways Scheme provides priority access to a boarding or independent day school place for Looked After and Vulnerable Children (LAVC). It builds on this Government's commitment that if the independent and boarding school sector has been proven to offer some of the highest quality education in the country, then it should be accessible where possible to children who face the greatest educational obstacles.

Currently the scheme works by unlocking commitment on the part of participating schools to meet the majority of the costs of placements from within their bursary award schemes, with some additional ongoing funding provided by Local Authority (where the placement includes a residential element).

In order to equip Local Authorities with the knowledge of where a boarding/independent day school place might be an appropriate intervention for a LAC, and to broker low-cost (significant fee remission) and support pastoral readiness amongst the participating independent schools, the DfE has funded a charity (RNCSF) to coordinate the scheme's delivery.

RNCSF's role is to:

- a) ensure the careful identification, matching and placing of children into the right independent boarding or day school for their academic profile and broader interests
- b) quality assure the schools to ensure they have the requisite pastoral care and training in attachment/trauma based practices;
- c) provide oversight to monitor the progress of the young people, and convening the parties needed across statutory, non-statutory and schools' services where adjustments/ additional support might be identified as necessary
- d) collate the evidence of successful placements in order to evaluate that there is both a positive impact for the child, the school and local authority, and the taxpayer.

This model of careful preparation, matching and transition planning and partnership between schools and Local Authority staff is rooted in the learnings from RNCSF's experience supporting 450 vulnerable children in 150 independent schools in the period 2013-2022.

How is each placement currently funded?

On average each independent boarding place for LAC costs c. £35k-£40k p/a. The government is seeking schools to commit to meeting the majority of these costs themselves, through priority access for LAC to schools' own 110% bursary awards. However, recognising that for some independent schools there may be a hesitancy to commit to significant placement activity without some contributions to cover some of the costs associated with those places, the scheme is exploring a co-funding arrangement, in which:

For independent boarding places:

- at least £22k p/a from the private school in fee remission
- c. £8k that RNCSF seeks to broker from the local authority (to cover residential aspect of provision, an amount determined by the avoided foster carer allowance cost in term-time)
- small grants of £5k that RNCSF can at times use to unlock the school's own fee remission. These small grants are deliberately set at the level to mirror the state-per-pupil spend, with the intention of drawing attention to the merits of a GAG redirect scheme to support growth in placement activity

Each £12k-£15k independent day place is funded through:

- at least c£12k from the private school in fee remission
- £0k from the local authority (no residential aspect of provision)
- £2.5k from RNCSF's fundraised income, allocated as grant contributions towards the marginal costs (to unlock the 90% fee remission) where absolutely necessary and to highlight the GAG redirect option.

What are the benefits?

Outcomes for LAVC placed at a boarding or independent school in the scheme so far show significant value-add in academic attainment, wellbeing & University progression

- A 95% retention rate - the vast majority continue in their schools through to achieving KS5 qualifications
- 59% have attained five or more A*-C grades at GCSE incl. English & Maths
- 92% have achieved at least 2 A-Levels at KS5 - equivalent to gaining 12 months academic progress.

Representing significant value for money for the taxpayer in the lifetime trajectory and associated lifetime earnings. In many cases it has also represented immediate savings in a) avoiding the at least £37k p/a if they entered other children's social care provision pathways; b) foster carer allowances if boarding is included.

What does the Broadening Education Pathways Scheme need?

Over the next three years RNCSF's modelling suggests up to c.1000 LAVC can secure a boarding / independent school place. But to achieve this requires:

1. More independent schools willing to offer fee remission and commit to the RNCSF 'accreditation' process to assure Local Authorities of the schools' ability to meet the needs of vulnerable children. Active support and communications from the Department for Education to a) independent schools and b) local authorities to reinforce the benefits of the scheme, its alignment with recent Government policy and encourage greater involvement from both parties.

2. A mechanism built into the National Funding Formula that automatically allocates the money LAVC would have been receiving in their mainstream provision to the independent school they are placed in under the BEP scheme (currently in discussion)

What adjustments might my school need to put in place to get involved?

The BEP scheme delivery team support schools' to understand and prepare for some of the common pastoral and safeguarding issues that can accompany vulnerable children.

The approach to 'accreditation' of participating schools as appropriate environments for particular children involves:

- a) An assessment by the BEP delivery team of any recent ISI/OFSTED findings
- b) Requirement for participating schools to nominate a senior staff member (usually DSL/Asst Head Pastoral) to be the Designated Teacher for LAC/CIN and liaise with RNCSF's BEP delivery team to risk-assess each pupil's needs prior to placement offer, and consider any additional training needs for the 'team around the child' (e.g. DSL, DDSL, 'house'parent if relevant, tutors, matrons/health centre staff) in attachment and trauma-based practices. Relevant training providers are recommended by RNCSF
- c) On securing a bursary place, each LAC/CIN will have a Personal Education Plan (a PEP), which follows them from their previous school setting. This forms an integral part of the child's continuing care plan and participating schools will need to take a lead in PEP planning meetings, in partnership with the Local Authority and with the support of RNCSF's BEP delivery team.. The PEP process provides a termly platform for discussions with relevant care givers and the Local Authority about what needs to happen in order for the child to fulfil their potential both in and outside of school.

The evidence of placements under the scheme to date show that most independent schools are already very well equipped to support and respond to vulnerable young people's needs, given the excellence in pastoral provision. Participating schools note that including a focus on vulnerable children in bursary award schemes provides them with opportunities to further enhance their pastoral support in a way that benefits all children in their schools.

What does a contextualised admissions commitment require from my school?

Recognising this is not a 'level playing field' - LAVC candidates put forward for the scheme will participate in a common contextualised admissions process that shields them from participating in numerous schools' specific rigorous 11+/16+ entrance exam/testing. This standard contextualised admissions process is run by RNCSF, who:

- advertise the potential opportunity to VSHs to identify potentially eligible LAVC pupils in the summer term of their Yr5/Yr10;
- triage the applications through a rigorous assessment of the eligibility and 'fit' for a bursary opportunity in close consultation with VSHs;
- approach schools who have shown a willingness and commitment to participating in the scheme with the details of potential pupils within the autumn term prior to the young person's year of entry,
- in order that schools can meet and assess those candidates as potential bursary recipients prior to the main 11+/16+ entry exam cycle of early 2022.

The Contextualised Admissions Process

RNCSF get to know each individual LAVC candidate's care profile, academic ability, pastoral needs and co-curricular interests in order to recommend the right school to suit their

profile. The child will be shielded and not informed of the possibility of accessing a bursary place until RNCSF, Local Authority and Schools have established the probability of an offer

- For 11+ candidates RNCSF will provide schools with a Pupil Pack in around Oct/Nov with the following details:
 - o A judgement of the pupil's broad academic 'potential' as demonstrated by:
 - a CAT4 test that they will have participated in a low-key/no pressure environment (ordinarily at their current school)
 - school reports and detail of expected KS2 English/Maths levels, including any EHCP/SEN
 - o Interview report from conversations that RNCSF staff have had with both foster carers/ guardians and pupils
 - o Draft risk assessment considerations for schools to reflect on suitability of their provision
- Leading to contextualised offer
- At 16+ the above will be the same, but expected GCSE results will form part of the school references and contextualised offers are expected to include some conditions relating to exam performance.

Once a LAVC pupil has been 'matched' to an available and appropriate bursary place, RNCSF will support schools and pupils through a consistent preparation programme – bridging support for LAVC (e.g. in academic uplift) and providing schools with access to CPD and a community of practice from a growing network of day and boarding schools staff with experience of successfully supporting LAVC to thrive

To find out more about how to participate as a school please contact schools@royalspringboard.org.uk