

School Admissions – Information for Social Workers

When a child or young person is taken into care, we have a responsibility to keep things as stable as possible for them. Maintaining continuity by keeping the child in the same school is a priority. The school may change later as the child is placed permanently. We should make every effort to keep them in their existing school to ensure continuity of learning, friendships, and pastoral support from their school. Where this isn't possible, you should work in partnership with the Virtual School to identify appropriate educational provision. As lead professional, you should always complete school application forms; this shouldn't be done by carers.

Information about the nature of any placement which offers educational provision as part of the package must always be sought from the Access to Resources Team.

Where a child becomes a Child in Care and is placed within Cambridgeshire, the placements considered should take into account where the child currently attends school. The Virtual School must be consulted before any change is considered or communicated to the child. If, for any reason, a child has to change school, you should, wherever possible, make sure that a new school place has been secured before moving a child from their current school.

Why may I need to find a school place for a Child in Care?

You may need to find a new school place for a Child in Care if they're:

- starting school for the first time
- at the stage of moving from primary to secondary school education
- at the stage of moving from year 2 to year 3, if attending an infant school
- being moved a significant distance to a new care placement, for example to live with a family member. **Where it is feasible to transport the child to their current school, the school move should only take place once permanency has been agreed**
- to be moved from their current school on a permanent basis for safeguarding reasons
- being placed for adoption.

Who should I involve?

- The social worker must notify the Virtual School as soon as plans to move the young person are being considered. You should always consult the Virtual School before making plans for a school move. Where a child is placed out of their home LA in a planned way, then staff from the Virtual School will research local schools and will liaise with staff from the Virtual School from the receiving LA in order to find the best school for that child / young person.
- You should work in close partnership with the other key adults involved in the care and education of the child, to make sure that the choice of school is appropriate, and that it forms a positive part of the child's care plan. It's crucial that you involve the young person in the decision making process.
- Under no circumstances should the proposed carers be asked to seek a school for the child; although their views should be listened to, particularly if they have knowledge of the local area.

What should I consider before applying for a school place?

Before applying for a school place, the Virtual School should always be contacted and will support the process.

The school's Ofsted rating:

- You must always consider the current Ofsted judgement of the school.
- Statutory guidance states that good or outstanding schools should be prioritised and children in care shouldn't be placed in schools with an inadequate Ofsted rating. The Virtual School will support you in reviewing the most recent Ofsted reports.

Where a child's already attending a school which is inspected and judged to be requires improvement or inadequate, the Virtual School will increase it's advisory meeting schedule with the school. Education advisors will also make use of the termly personal education planning and monitoring process to assess the progress they're making, and to make a judgement as to whether there needs to be a change in school.

The school's location:

- You should consider how easily it will be for the child's carer to get them to school.
- While convenience shouldn't be the overriding factor, where two or more schools could meet the child's needs, you can consider ease of travel arrangements.
- Where the child is at an appropriate age and stage of development, you should consider how, over time, independent travel can be promoted.

How do I apply for a school place?

Before an application is submitted, the Virtual School should be consulted about the choice of school.

- For moves to a Cambridgeshire school, the social worker should then complete a school application form via the Cambridgeshire Admissions website:
<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-&-learning/apply-for-a-school-place/>
- The form can be completed online or emailed back to admissions@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
- Once Cambridgeshire's Admissions Service receives the application they will liaise with relevant school. You will then receive an offer of a school place from the Admissions Service.
- The Virtual School must be involved in order that they can fast track the admissions procedure in order to ensure that no child is out of education.

There are key dates to be aware of when applying for school places:

- The annual closing date for applying for a Reception primary school place is 15th January.
- The annual closing date for applying for a Year 7 secondary school place is 31st October.

These are national dates and therefore there are no exceptions for Children in Care.

All other moves will be in-year admissions and an in-year application should be completed.

Applying for a place in a school outside Cambridgeshire

- Before an application is submitted for a place, Cambridgeshire Virtual School should be consulted about the choice of school. Cambridgeshire Virtual School will liaise with the other Authority as required.
- Where a child is placed out of authority, the Virtual School will offer support to the new school regarding the PEP process and use of the PP+ grant. They will continue to Quality Assure all ePEPs as part of the monitoring system set up by the Head of the Virtual School.
- When a suitable school has been identified, check the relevant Local Authority's arrangements for moving school during the year.
- The social worker should complete an application form and submit it either to the relevant Local Authority or directly to a school as advised.
- Where a child is placed out of their home LA in a planned way, then staff from the Virtual School will research local schools and will liaise with staff from the Virtual School from the receiving LA in order to find the best school for that child / young person. The social worker must notify the Virtual School as soon as plans to move the young person are being considered. **Under no circumstances should the proposed carers be asked to seek a school for the child.**

What if the child has SEND or an EHCP?

Where a child has a special educational need, a school best placed to meet those needs must be identified. This may be mainstream or specialist, and may or may not be the child's catchment school.

If the child has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), The Statutory Assessment Team must be involved; you should always check with the statutory assessment team, prior to placement, that the appropriate specialist provision is available in the location you're looking to place the child.

It will be necessary for the child's named casework officer to undertake a statutory consultation process to identify a school that can meet the specific needs identified in the EHCP. If a child is undergoing a statutory assessment for special educational needs, you should make every effort to keep them in their current school until the assessment has been finalised, and the appropriate type of provision has been identified. (This may take up to 20 weeks.)

Where a child has significant special educational needs, or an EHCP, transition planning for secondary school should begin early in Year 5.

Transport

Consistency of school placement is important and where possible, children should stay at their existing school when a placement move is necessary. In order to maintain continuity of school, those with responsibility for school transport should be approached to provide assistance with transport. A decision will be made taking into account the child's age and the distance from the child's address to the nearest suitable school.

It is important to ensure that the taxi company gets the child to school on time, but not too early and that the school knows who to contact if there are problems.

Children should be enabled to attend clubs and activities before and after school and taxi bookings should be organised to ensure that this is possible.

It's especially important that everything should be done to avoid moving a young person who's approaching the end of Key Stage 2, in Years 5 and 6. At this stage, pupils are preparing for their end of Key Stage assessments and beginning to plan for transition to secondary school.

It's also very important to avoid moving young people who are in Key Stage 4, in Years 10 and 11. By this stage, young people have begun their exam courses. Different secondary schools often use different examination boards, which can lead to significant complications if a child has to move schools once they've started their exam courses.

Ideally, all school moves should be undertaken at the beginning of a new academic year to reduce the negative impact on the child.

Unless there are compelling reasons otherwise, school moves should be avoided until a permanent placement has been confirmed.