

APPENDIX A

Boarding School Partnership

Sufficiency and alternatives to care.

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Introduction

The Department of Education's Boarding School Partnership is a collaboration with a number of independent and state boarding schools nationally, which aims to improve outcomes for young people and reduce the reliance on fostering and residential care provision for young people in care by using boarding school provision.

Warwickshire County Council started working on developing the Boarding School Partnership in Warwickshire in 2018 with the aim to use this partnership to offer further flexibility and increase its placement sufficiency by incorporating an additional placement option.

Research by the Department of Education's Boarding School Partnership has demonstrated that children in care or those on the edge of care have experienced improved education outcomes, stability and health and wellbeing. Furthermore in some circumstances boarding school placements have allowed closer maintenance of family relationships. In addition local authorities have reported financial savings, when compared to the alternative cost of external foster care or residential care. Please see Appendix 2 for details of the Department of Education's Boarding School Partnership.

Context

The national rate of children looked after by Local Authorities has been increasing nationally. This rate of increase has also affected Warwickshire County Council. In addition, there has been a national pattern of a shortage of foster care placements, in particular a deficit in foster care placements specifically for secondary school age children.

Children's Services has three core strategic objectives:

- to reduce the number of children who are in Local Authority care,
- to reduce the reliance on expensive, external fostering and residential placements
- to reduce the escalation of need.

Warwickshire's boarding school policy can contribute to each of these goals by providing an alternative to the need for children to become looked after, by avoiding the use of fostering or residential placements and by encouraging reduction in risky behaviours, improved outcomes and supporting intra-familial relationships.

There are also options whereby the use of boarding schools can offer a best value alternative to fostering and residential placements.

The Policy

Warwickshire County Council's Boarding School Policy will ensure that:

- a) *All children who are deemed to be "at the edge of care" or who are already looked after by the Local Authority are considered for inclusion in the Boarding School Partnership.*
- b) *The Care Plan or Child In Need plan for each of the children selected for the Boarding School Partnership will adhere to the best practice and legal standards of care planning.*
- c) *All decisions regarding children who are part of the Boarding School Partnership will be made considering the wishes of the child, the views of any parent or guardian who holds Parental Responsibility and the assessed understanding of the Local Authority as to what constitutes the best interests of the child.*
- d) *The Boarding School Partnership will seek to improve outcomes for children in care or on the edge of care by ensuring that they are accommodated and educated in a well-matched placement which is quality assured by the Local Authority.*
- e) *The Boarding School Partnership will aim to promote healthy and safe family relationships throughout each child's time in boarding school.*

The Boarding School Partnership

Warwickshire County Council's Boarding School Policy defines the interpretation and use of the Department of Education's Boarding School Partnership for children in Warwickshire.

This policy only applies to children in two categories:

- a) Children who are already deemed to be "looked after" by Warwickshire County Council, this may be by virtue of a Care Order, Interim Care Order or a Section 20 agreement with the parents of the child

or

- b) Children who are deemed to be "edge of care" as a result of risk or need, they are likely to become looked after if alternative care provision and support is not provided. This will include children who have Child In Need status and/or Child Protection status and/or live with an alternative carer to their parent.

Inclusion in the Boarding School Partnership does not, in itself, impact upon a child's legal status. A child can only gain looked after status via the methods outlined above.

This policy does not apply to children who are applying for educational places via the education department and the right to determine which children are included in the partnership scheme remains solely with the Local Authority.

It is important to note, that only children who wish themselves to be included will be included in the Boarding School Partnership.

Similarly, placement under the Boarding School Partnership will be agreed in conjunction with any parents or guardians who hold parental responsibility.

Where the Local Authority shares parental responsibility under a Care Order or Interim Care Order, all efforts will be made by the Local Authority to work in partnership with parents and guardians to agree a school placement which is suitable.

This policy anticipates that the majority of children included in the Boarding School Partnership will be of secondary school age, 11-18. This reflects our vision of best practice in establishing family relationships in fostering placements for children who are under 11.

The Boarding Schools identified in the Department of Education's Boarding School Partnership are all mainstream schools, which would cater for a broad community of children. This Boarding School Policy is not intended to replace or alter any policy regarding specialist education.

Furthermore, inclusion in the Boarding School Partnership does not ensure that specific schools will agree to accommodate and educate that specific child. The schools in question will retain their own admission criteria and policies.

Assessment of children suitable for boarding school.

Warwickshire County Council will consider all children who are looked after and whether children are considered suitable for a boarding school place. Equally, where a child is deemed to be at "the edge of care" boarding schools will be considered to establish whether their needs are best met via boarding schools. However, priority will be maintained always on maintaining children safely within their families. Warwickshire County Council have devised an assessment tool to assist in placement matching and information transfer. (See Appendix 3)

An assessment and selection exercise will take place in September for consideration of Boarding School for the following academic year. This exercise will be undertaken jointly between a representative of Children's Services and the Virtual School for looked after children. All children who are looked after will be considered by virtue of their characteristics, for example age, placement type, and special educational needs.

Following identification, conversations will be had with the respective Operations Manager with the allocated social worker, foster carers, residential placements,

parents and child to establish whether all parties wish to proceed. Where children are looked after the independent reviewing officer will also be included in the care planning through the child's statutory review.

Other children will be considered throughout the academic year for inclusion in the Boarding School Partnership. It is anticipated that these children will be nominated by professionals who have assessed a child as having a boarding need. Children who are nominated within the school year will then go through the same consideration process as the children considered in September.

Once specific children have been identified as suitable for the Boarding School Partnership, the Boarding School Partnership Board, which is chaired by the Assistant Director for Children & Families or their Service Manager representative, they are proposed for final authorisation and agreement that the placement in a boarding school is the right decision for the child.

Selection of a boarding school

In each case, efforts will be made to ensure that close matching takes place between the school and the child to ensure that the school selected can best meet the child's needs and promote the best outcomes for the child.

Warwickshire County Council will seek to establish and maintain professional relationships with the boarding schools within the county and in the West Midlands.

There are no state boarding schools within Warwickshire; however, state boarding schools offer a good value boarding opportunity and Warwickshire will seek to place in state boarding schools wherever this is a suitable option for a child.

Independent boarding schools vary considerably in their costs and this will also be taken into consideration when schools are matched with children. In the instance that an independent boarding is selected the efforts will be taken to place in schools which have subscribed to the 40% reduction in fees of the Department of Education Boarding School Partnership.

In addition, Warwickshire County Council will seek to obtain financial support from the schools' bursary and scholarship provision or from charities.

Warwickshire County Council will always seek to ensure that the schools are of a suitable standard and will review the schools' policies, reports and will only place in schools with a good or outstanding Ofsted inspection. In addition, the Local Authority will work in partnership with the school to check that they can offer the level of support that the child requires.

Prior to application to a school, the child and their parents and guardian will be encouraged to visit the school and satisfy themselves of its suitability. In order to compare and select a school the child will be encouraged to visit 2 or 3 schools.

If the child does not wish to continue with the process following a visit then the child's decision is final and will be respected by the Local Authority.

If the child and parents or guardian are in agreement that a suitable school has been identified then steps will be taken to secure a placement.

Securing a placement

Once a child has been successfully introduced to a school, the process of securing a placement will be initiated with the Boarding School Partnership Board to seek agreement with the match of the child with the boarding school that is proposed.

The social worker will then support the child in completing the application process of the specific school. Each school will have their own admissions process which will be publicised on their own websites; this will include assessments, interviews and may include testing.

Where possible trial visits to the schools will be complemented by further familiarisation visits, which could include overnight stays in the boarding facilities.

To assist the school in selection and to ensure that the school is confident that they can meet the child's needs information will be shared with the school about the child's circumstances, personality and academic performance.

If the school or the child recognises uncertainty in the placement, then a trial period will be agreed to ensure that the child's needs can be met within the placement.

The social worker will ensure that all of these decisions are shared with the professional group working with the child and their family. Where the child is looked after then the views of the Independent Reviewing Officer will be sought to ensure that the placement is congruent with the plan for the child.

Once the school admission process is completed, then the exchange of contracts will be completed. Children's Commissioning will support the process by agreeing the signing of contracts. Wherever possible, the National Schools Contract will be used as this has been agreed by procurement and legal mechanisms. If the school require a specific contract be signed then this will require additional legal and procurement approval. Final contracts will require authorisation by the Assistant Director for Children & Families.

The child's parents and guardians should sign all contracts and agreements, and Warwickshire County Council will agree and sign all documents where they share parental responsibility. Additionally, Warwickshire County Council will sign all documents which agree a financial spend.

Setting up a placement

Prior to starting a boarding school placement, the social worker, the child and the parents or guardians will coordinate to ensure that the child is prepared for the placement. For each child a plan should be agreed to make it clear whether the child will be boarding on a weekly, termly or whole year basis.

The schools will provide equipment lists and the parents and guardians will work with the Local Authority to ensure that the child is fully equipped. The school and the Local Authority will ensure that the parents and guardians have all the relevant information and joining instructions for the school. In some circumstances, the Local Authority may assist in practical arrangements.

For each child a plan will be agreed stipulating the level of family time (contact) between the child and their family. This will include levels of supervision. Wherever possible the school will be encouraged to include the parents and guardians in the communication and day to day arrangements for the child. Where there are risk factors associated with family time (contact) any restrictions will be shared with the school so that they can enforce these restrictions.

The social worker will assist the school by providing key documentation and information; this may include minutes of Looked After Child Review Meetings (LACR) or Personal Education Plans (PEPS.) All information will be shared with the consent of the relevant parties and will be shared via appropriate, secured methods in line with the Information Governance procedures of Warwickshire County Council. In order to facilitate sharing of information Warwickshire County Council can give Egress and EPEP log ins to the schools. A secure login can be sent to the schools so that they can complete the required PEP for each child remotely. Egress allows documentation to be shared via the transfer of a secure login code, rather than relying on email transmission of confidential and personal data. This allows partnership working to occur without the risk of data breaches.

Support for the placement

The Local Authority will continue to remain in close contact with the child, the school and the family throughout the placement duration. Warwickshire County Council is committed to supporting the placements for all children and this support will be ensured during their placement in a boarding school provision.

A multidisciplinary approach to supporting the schools will be provided. The schools will be able to contact the Operations Manager who is the liaison between Warwickshire County Council and the providers to ensure that secure partnership arrangements are in place. Similarly, support is provided via the commissioning and finance departments to ensure that contractual, financial and quality assurance support are available throughout placement.

Commissioning will conduct quality assurance activities in line with agreed standards, this will include referring data, inspections but will also include visits to the placements. The quality assurance actions will be both planned and reactive.

Warwickshire County Council is committed to placement stability for all children in a placement secured by the local authority and will provide advice and guidance for how best to support the children during placement in order to achieve best possible outcomes for the child and to maintain placement stability.

The child will retain an allocated social worker and they will be encouraged to keep in contact with their social worker. The child will be visited, both in placement and at home, by their social worker using the statutory levels as a minimum. It is anticipated that an increased rate of visits would be required in the early stages of placement and if the child experiences difficulties.

The social worker will also remain in contact with the parents or guardians to ensure that they are aware of any changes in the family, this might include risk information.

The social worker will also remain in contact with the school to ensure that the placement is progressing well for the child.

All statutory requirements will remain in force for the child during their placement, this will include statutory looked after child visits and Looked After Child Reviews (LACRs). The level of statutory visits and the schedule will be shared with the school so that they can plan accordingly.

As per best practice guidance for LACRs, a suitable venue will be chosen and this might be in the school.

In addition to the standard care planning activities, a tailored Individual Placement Agreement will be completed for each child attending boarding provision to ensure that the Local Authority has clarified with all involved parties how this placement will be tailored to ensure that the outcomes for the child are supported.

Disruptions and concluding a placement

Where a child, a school, the family or any other professionals are concerned about the stability of a placement in a boarding school, all steps will be taken support the placement and prevent avoidable disruptions.

In these instances, the steps outlined in the placement stability policy should be followed. In particular, if further support is required then the Local Authority should work with the partner agencies to identify support resources for the family. A disruption meeting can be called to ensure that all consideration is given to supporting the placement.

Each school will have and will follow their own disciplinary and welfare processes, these processes will be available via the school websites. In the instance that they have to invoke their discipline and welfare policies the schools will communicate with the child, family, social worker and where relevant the Virtual School.

Where a disruption occurs and there are active legal proceedings the Local Authority will keep the parties to proceedings up to date with information.

Where a child is looked after the social worker will keep the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) up to date with any disruptions and if a disruption results in a change of care plan then the IRO can convene a subsequent LACR.

If the child requires a further placement due to a disruption then the social worker will assess what is a suitable next placement and will make a request for a placement via the Warwickshire County Council fostering hub.

Complementary Placements (wrap around care)

Each boarding school operates on a termly basis. Full year boarding is an option for some schools, but this would only be considered in unusual circumstances.

The selected children will need suitable placements to complement their boarding school placement.

Where children are safely able to return to parents, guardians or family during holidays and weekends this will be prioritised.

Where children have been previously accommodated in foster placement, efforts will be made to allow the child to retain this relationship and return to the placement for holidays. In these circumstances the foster carer will need to agree to the boarding placement and will need to agree to reduce their fostering placement fees. Warwickshire County Council fostering may be able to offer a retainer for Warwickshire County Council foster carers. All retainers would remain at the discretion of the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting. All agreements regarding placement retainers would need to be formally agreed prior to placements starting

If a child is placed in boarding school and is unable to return to family or a prior foster carer then the authority would seek to place the child in an alternative placement which is regular and predictable for all of their school holidays.

In extreme circumstances alternative provision might be sought for a child, for example activity holidays.

Concluding Education

In line with other policies with regards to children who are in the care of the Local Authority, Warwickshire County Council will seek to promote high achievement and outcomes for all Boarding School Partnership children.

At the conclusion of Key Stage 4 (end of year 11) a further education placement will be sought for all children and this will be planned as part of the ongoing CIN or CLA planning processes. Some children might seek to remain in the Boarding School Partnership to conclude their education, whereas for others they might seek

alternative education and accommodation, for example a move home and schooling locally. Each decision will be reviewed individually bearing in mind the best interests of the child.

Leaving Care Status

All boarding school placements are governed in alignment with the relevant leaving care legislation.

All children who have enjoyed a boarding school placement on a CIN basis are unaffected by leaving care legislation and do not acquire this status.

All children who have been CLA whilst in a boarding school placement are subject to the standard leaving care regulations and legislation.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsible teams

A number of different teams and organisations are responsible for delivering this policy.

Warwickshire County Council Children's Services will be responsible for the day to day operation and governance of this policy.

The Boarding School Partnership Board will be chaired by the Assistant Director for Children and Families or a delegated Service Manager.

The Boarding School Partnership Board retains responsibility for the approval of candidate children, the matching of placements and the agreement for financial spending.

The allocated social worker retains case accountability and will continue to support and assess the child, ensuring that all plans are delivered to achieve good outcomes for the child.

The management hierarchies of the allocated social worker will retain oversight throughout the placement of the child.

Where a child has looked after status this child's plan will be monitored by the IRO as per the standard processes for all looked after children.

Partner responsibilities

The school retains all the responsibility as per their statutory framework, this includes the responsibility to educate the child and keep the child safe in their care.

The schools will all publish their own raft of policies to demonstrate how they implement these responsibilities.

Arrangements for the health monitoring of the child will continue to be secured via the standard arrangements.

Where the child would have the support of the Virtual School by virtue of looked after status, this will continue in the boarding placement.

All contract issues will be managed by the Children's Commissioning Service, this will include contracts. A package of quality assurance will also be implemented via the Children's Commissioning Service to ensure that due diligence is maintained with regards to suitability of placements.

If this original pilot is deemed to be successful, both in terms of outcomes for children and also in terms of financial savings, then a full procurement process and commissioning framework agreement will be required.

All contracts which vary from the National Schools Contract will need further oversight from Legal Services.

Parent and Child Responsibilities

The parent or guardian retains their Parental Responsibility throughout this process. The Local Authority only gain Parental Responsibility if a relevant Court order is sought.

The parent retains their responsibilities to work with the social worker and continue to meet the child's needs. In addition, the parent is responsible for ensuring that their own behaviours promote the safety and welfare of the child.

Additional expenses, which are agreed by the parent or guardian, remain the responsibility of the parent or guardian.

The child is responsible for upholding the school rules and abiding with the safety requirements of the placement,

Finance & Resources

Research by the Department of Education's Boarding School Partnership has demonstrated that children in care or those on the edge of care have experienced improved education outcomes, stability and health and wellbeing which will lead to improved outcomes for children and investment which will lead to savings in the longer term for local authorities if children are enabled to contribute positively as adults to their local community.

Local authorities have reported financial savings, when compared to the alternative

cost of external foster care or residential care. However, costs vary and can be dependent upon a number of individual factors relating to the individual boarding schools costs, which are generally lower for state boarding to independent boarding schools and upon the care provision required during school holidays.

Funding for boarding schools will be accessed from the existing placement budget within Children & Families. The Boarding School Partnership Board which is chaired by the Assistant Director for Children & Families or their Service Manager representative will need to balance decisions to agree boarding school placement as they do for all other situations relating to children being looked after upon the best outcomes for the child and ensuring best value for money for the local authority. Cost related to boarding schools will be monitored and reported upon as part of placement costs.

Monitoring and Review

This policy is time-bound for the duration of the Boarding School Partnership pilot. This pilot is intended to conclude in July 2019 at the end of the school year. The Boarding School Partnership Board will continue to monitor and assess the pilot.

At the end of this pilot a review will be undertaken to assess the successes of the Boarding School Partnership. If it is concluded that this option offers a useful alternative to foster care, allows children to achieve to their potential and offers a financial saving for the Local Authority then the grounds will be met for continuing the pilot into a sustainable placement option might be met.

Additionally, the findings might indicate that whilst this placement option can return a financial saving but that very specific circumstances are required to achieve this, or that as a placement option, it supports insufficient numbers of children. In these circumstances, the pilot might not continue into a full policy option due to the low scalability of the programme.

If the findings do not support the continuation of the pilot then the commitments will be retained for the children already in placement, but no further candidates will be sought.

The Boarding School Partnership Board will evaluate the success of the policy. This includes tracking and reporting on the education, social and wellbeing outcomes for children who attend a boarding school under this new policy.

An annual report on the outcomes of children placed in boarding schools will be completed, which will include a longitudinal evaluation of outcomes for children.

Further Information

Queries and feedback

For all queries or to provide feedback please contact:

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Commissioning Queries

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Information in other formats

We will aim to provide this information in a format suitable for your needs. Please contact us so we can discuss your requirements.

<https://i.warwickshire.gov.uk/content/interpreting-and-translation/interpreting-and-translation>

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Norfolk research highlights success of boarding school partnerships

<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/news/2018/06/norfolk-research-highlights-success-of-boarding-partnerships>

Appendix 2 – Department of Education Boarding School Partnership

<https://www.boardingschoolpartnerships.org.uk/>

Appendix 3 – Boarding School Assessment Tool

[Boarding School Assessment Tool](#)

Appendix 4 – Boarding School Partnership Process Mapping



Boarding School
Process map.pdf