



Aiming High: Guidance on Supporting the Education of Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children

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A Guide to Good Practice

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FOREWORD

All children and young people should be able to achieve their potential, whatever their ethnic and cultural background and which ever school they attend.

There is broad recognition that teaching the children of asylum seekers and refugees can be both challenging and rewarding. We know that some schools and LEAs have developed good practice and introduced initiatives to meet the needs of these children. This guidance provides information that ranges from the role of LEAs through to advice on how to support individual communities. I hope that the information and good practice contained in this document will help you in your work to raise the achievement of the children of asylum seekers and refugees.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Margaret Hodge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MBE MP
Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families

Guidance on Supporting the Education of Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children

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1. Who are Asylum Seekers and Refugees?

Definitions

1.1 Asylum Seekers are people who flee their home country and seek refugee status in another, possibly because of war or human rights abuses, and then lodge an application for asylum with that Government.

A person is recognised as a refugee when the Government decides they meet the definition of a refugee under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and accepts that that person has a well founded fear of being persecuted.

1.2 An asylum application can be lodged at the point of entry or after the applicant has arrived in the UK. After full consideration of a case, there may be one of three outcomes:

- granted full refugee status
- granted Humanitarian Protection (this status replaced exceptional leave to remain in April 2003)
- granted Discretionary Leave (this status also replaced exceptional leave to remain in April 2003)

1.3 While most asylum seeking children arrive in the UK with one or both parents, some do not. They may arrive with friends or relatives who are not their usual carers, or they may arrive as unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines an unaccompanied asylum seeking child as being under 18 years old and not cared for by that child's usual carers. In the event that there is no suitable adult to care for these children, the responsibility rests with the social services department of the local authority and the children are cared for under the provisions of the Children Act 1989.

Entitlement to social welfare and education

1.4 Asylum seekers are no longer granted permission to work in the UK. A small number of asylum seekers receive income support and housing benefits, others receive support from local authorities under the provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. However, the numbers of asylum seekers supported by benefits or by local authorities is very small, and is continually decreasing as decisions are made on their cases.

1.5 Asylum seekers who have made an application for asylum as soon as was reasonably practicable on entering the country and who are destitute may now apply for support with accommodation and essential living needs from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Children in families supported by these measures have full rights to healthcare and children of compulsory school age have full rights to education. They are also entitled to free school meals, school milk and school uniform grants.

Asylum seeking and refugee children's background

1.7 Asylum seeking pupils come from many different countries, which vary over time, as do the conditions that force them to flee. Like other groups of children they are a very diverse group and children from one particular country may come from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and their families may have different political beliefs and religious observances.

They may have a wide range of educational and social needs as some of them:

- have had an interrupted education in their countries of origin;
- have had horrific experiences in their home countries and flight to the UK, and for a small number this may affect their ability to learn and rebuild their lives;
- have suffered a drop in their standard of living and other major changes in their lives;
- may not be cared for by their parents or usual carers;
- may have parents who are emotionally absent;
- speak little or no English on arrival in the UK.

2. Good Practice – the LEA's Role and Responsibilities

2.1 LEAs have legal duties towards asylum seeking and refugee children. Specifically they are obliged to:

- provide full-time education for all children of compulsory school age resident in that LEA, as outlined in Section 14 of the Education Act 1996;
- provide free school meals for all asylum seeking and refugee children on means tested benefits, those supported by the National Asylum Support Service, and those supported by local authorities. This obligation is outlined in Section 117 of Schedule 14 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
- LEAs have a duty to provide certain educational support for children in public care as outlined in Department of Health Circular LAC (2000) 13.

2.2 They also have a role to play in promoting good educational practice. LEAs are expected, through their Educational Development Plans and Early Years Development Plans to respond to the needs of asylum seeking and refugee children living in their area.

2.3 LEAs should ensure that there are no unreasonable delays in securing the admission of asylum seeking and refugee pupils and admission practice must be commensurate with that applied to all other pupils.

2.4 To ensure that the educational needs of these children are properly taken into account, LEAs are encouraged to develop local policies and procedures to facilitate access to, and support within, local schools. In particular, Chief Education Officers or Directors of Education should ensure that arrangements are in place to:

- ensure the production of a written educational policy on support to asylum seeking and refugee children, especially if it outlines issues of educational entitlement, as well as good practice;
- provide asylum seeking families with information on local schools and admissions procedures and early years provision;
- provide adequate support for mid term admissions;
- ensure that schools have access to good quality interpreting services;
- respond appropriately to the educational needs of 15 and 16 year olds seeking school places, ensuring that they receive full-time education;
- ensure English as an additional language (EAL) support is in place;
- ensure the development, through in-service training for all school staff, of the skills needed to support and teach asylum seeking and refugee children;
- Ensure that schools' admissions staff are aware of the entitlements to education of asylum seeking and refugee children and that they are sensitive when interviewing families who may speak little English.

Wakefield has received asylum seeking families dispersed by NASS. The local authority has formed a multidisciplinary reception team, comprising staff from social services, housing and education, as well as a part-time police officer and health worker. Asylum seekers are met and helped to settle into their new housing. Additionally, the local authority has a multi-agency working group on asylum, forging links between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

3. Good Practice - the Early Years

3.1 All asylum seeking and refugee children, including those in families granted Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave, have the same entitlement to early years provision as UK residents.

3.2 They have much to gain from good quality early years provision. For example, they will receive support in learning English before they enter compulsory education. Good practice for those involved with the coordination of early years services might include:

- ensuring that, within all local authorities and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, there is a person with designated responsibility for

asylum seeking and refugee children;

- ensuring that links are made with health visitors and early years services so that the latter know where to find asylum seeking and refugee children, to facilitate access to services;
- ensuring that information about early years provision is available in key community languages.

3.3 Central to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships plans should be the development of expertise in meeting the needs of asylum seeking and refugee children in local authority and community nursery provision. Principles of good early years practice apply to asylum seeking and refugee children too, including a commitment to equal opportunities, parental involvement and play as a child's right.

3.4 Specifically, these children need provision that can:

- meet their psychological needs, by, for example, using play to help a child settle;
- respond to their language needs;
- challenge racism and promote an understanding and positive acceptance of cultural diversity;
- involve parents who may not be confident in speaking English;
- support families who may be experiencing stress and economic deprivation;
- address issues of religious belief.

3.5 Over 70 per cent of asylum seeking and refugee children come from homes where little or no English is spoken so the setting could be their first contact with the English language. Developing a language policy in a setting is crucial to meeting the needs of these children. Good practice includes:

- ensuring that staff receive training on understanding and meeting the language needs of children;
- informing parents about the setting's language policy and stressing to parents the importance of speaking and reading to children in their home language;
- finding out from families which languages are spoken at home;
- wherever possible, employing bilingual early years workers who speak relevant languages;
- learning a few words in relevant languages, particularly greetings. Find out

from parents how children will tell you when they need to go to the toilet or when they are thirsty;

- letting children teach staff and other children some words in their home languages;
- purchasing resources such as bilingual tapes and books;
- making labels and signs in relevant languages;
- encouraging parents to come in and read stories or teach songs;
- remembering that children can understand what is said before they can express themselves fluently. It is important to keep communicating with children and ensuring that their environment is language-rich;
- being a good language role model by speaking slowly to children, but in a natural voice;
- encouraging productive language such as hellos and good-byes.

3.6 Play has much to offer asylum seeking and refugee children in early years settings. It can help them make sense of the stresses and changes in their lives. It also offers children the chance to gain confidence through interacting with peers and exploring their environment. Asylum seeking children living in hostel accommodation, sometimes with stressed or emotionally absent parents, are likely to be missing most or all of what they need for play. A useful way to support such children would be to organise a parent and toddler group, crèche or visits to local play facilities.

The following activities may be useful:

- sensory and exploratory play, such as with sand, water, noise putty and slime. A treasure basket containing materials of different textures or objects that make different noises can be used to encourage such play. Also useful are small toys, figures and other objects that facilitate the telling of stories, and puppets, props and clothes for role-play;
- drama, including mime, puppetry, the use of miniature figures and mask-making which allows children to play out feelings and 'problems';
- opportunities for free play, particularly in home corners, allows children to use play to interpret stressful events that have taken place in their lives;
- using stories, followed by discussion, acting and play. For example, *A Bear Called Paddington* could be used to help children act out a story-line about moving to a new country.

3.7 The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 obliges early years settings to promote an understanding and positive acceptance of cultural diversity and be active

in challenging racism. The early years are an important time for learning the social skills and values needed in adult life. The curriculum should enable children to explore values such as sharing and equal respect. It can be used to examine issues such as moving, fear, justice, being new and ethnic diversity, for example by:

- telling children folk-tales from the children's countries of origin and inviting in parents or others from the community to tell stories;
- using toys and books that depict people from different ethnic groups, particularly doing everyday things like shopping and cooking. Teachers should acquire resources and examples from a wide range of cultures: dual language books should be purchased and black dolls used alongside white dolls;
- celebrating various Faiths, for example Muslim, Jewish and Hindu festivals as well as Christmas and Easter;
- children should be encouraged to celebrate their home language. There should be labels and signs in relevant languages. Teaching all the children songs in the various languages of the children in the group helps to celebrate multilingualism.

4. Providing a Welcoming Environment in School

4.1 Rapid enrolment and regular attendance at school is highly desirable for asylum seeking and refugee children. Children should be offered a school place as soon as possible after arrival in the authority in accordance with their published admissions arrangements.

4.2 Pupils who arrive in Years 5, 6, 10 or 11 of their schooling are expected to sit SATs and public examinations. However, if pupils have English as an additional language they are exempt from inclusion in school and LEA league tables for a two year period. A head teacher can choose to include such a pupil in league tables, if desired.

4.3 All students who arrive after the start of the year need special induction procedures. Induction is designed to help students settle into a new school and become effective learners as quickly as possible. It aims to make the first crucial weeks in a new school a happy experience. Some children come from countries where the education system is different. Schools may have been differently organised and the style of teaching may be more formal; laboratory practicals or group work might be unknown. The range of subjects taught in a child's home country might also be different.

4.4 Once children have a school place, the initial meeting and interview with parents/carers and their children is a time for good relationships to be established. Parents/carers should be made to feel they can trust the school and be able to provide key educational information about the child in confidence. It is reasonable to ask parents/carers about languages spoken at home, past schooling and about their relationship to the child, as children may have experienced changes of carer. Families can also be asked if they are in receipt of benefits or asylum support

vouchers, as this will affect the administration of free school meals and other benefits. Schools are required to see proof of date of birth, but not passports or immigration documents.

4.5 Investing time in developing good induction policy is almost certainly time well spent, anticipating and preventing problems later. Schools should consider the following good induction practice:

- ensuring that parents/carers are shown around the school and that possible differences in teaching methods, how their children will be helped to learn English and particular requirements, such as uniforms and homework policies, are discussed;
- ensuring that parents/carers are informed about their rights to free school meals, school milk, travel and uniform grants;
- ensuring that, wherever possible, there is an interpreter or bilingual classroom assistant when the child starts school to help them settle;
- providing training and information for all school staff involved with admissions about the background of the children;
- ensuring that all relevant staff are informed that they will be receiving a new pupil;
- ensuring that each child is interviewed to assess their past educational experiences and future needs, and that this information is accurately recorded and forwarded to all relevant teaching and support staff;
- ensuring that pupils receive any welcome materials such as a map of the local area, plan of the school, name of their class teacher, details of any 'buddy' or mentor and timetable;
- ensuring that the pupil's progress is reassessed after a specified period, for example half a term, and that there are monitoring procedures in place;
- ensuring that there are opportunities for pupils who are not coping to be withdrawn for small group tuition or mentoring.

5. Meeting Pupil's Language Needs

5.1 Many asylum seeking pupils arrive in the UK speaking little or no English. Rapid English language acquisition is key to their successful integration into the UK education system and the wider community.

5.2 These children's linguistic background may be very varied. Some will have had little or no contact with the English language or the Roman alphabet. Some will have received little or no prior education and may not be literate in their home language. An accurate early assessment of these children's linguistic background is

important.

5.3 Newly arrived children are usually given additional help in learning English by specialist English as an additional language (EAL) teachers or by bilingual classroom assistants. However classroom teachers must also take responsibility for meeting the linguistic needs of these children by ensuring that pupils can participate in lessons. It is good practice in doing this for EAL teachers to work in collaboration with classroom teachers to plan lessons and teaching materials. Pupils may be withdrawn if:

- they have little or no previous schooling and lack literacy in their home language;
- they are total beginners in English;
- they request help with particular GCSE course assignments or they have specific problems with, for example, tense forms;
- they are having problems coping.

The following is considered effective practice to help a child learn English:

- make sure their names are pronounced properly, and they are greeted in every lesson;
- make sure pupils know the names of their teachers and support staff and that they have the opportunity to write down their names;
- sit the pupil next to sympathetic members of the class, preferably those who speak the same language and can translate;
- pupils are encouraged to contribute to the lesson by using the home language but do not worry if beginners say very little at first, as plenty of listening time is important when starting to learn a new language;
- beginners are taught some useful basic phrases such as yes, no, miss/sir, thank you, please can I have, I don't understand;
- pupils are encouraged to help give out equipment, and collect books, so they have to make contact with other children. However don't treat them as the class dogsbody!
- pupils are encouraged to learn the names of equipment, symbols or terms essential for your subject. Use pictures and labels. They can make their own 'dictionaries' for key words for your subject;
- pupils are asked for the home language equivalents of English words;
- visual cues, for example videos, slides, pictures, diagrams, flash cards and illustrated glossaries are used as appropriate.

A secondary school in the London Borough of Lewisham has 25% of its pupils with English as an additional language needs and 20% who came to the UK as asylum seekers or refugees.

On admission to school, pupils' performance in reading is assessed using the NFER standardised assessment test. Bilingual pupils also undertake an Initial Period Assessment within two weeks of arriving in school which provides background information and assesses writing levels using QCA steps or National Curriculum writing levels as appropriate. Support is systematically allocated depending on pupils' level of English language skills both in class, before and after school and at lunchtimes. An induction timetable is provided for pupils' completely new to English.

In the mainstream, EAL pupils' skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing are assessed using QCA national curriculum English levels. The EAL department provide a written update of progress for all pupils moving onto the main school timetable to all heads of department and heads of house. Additional targets for writing are set and monitored by the EAL department and shared with subject departments. Pupils also undertake self assessment of their writing targets using a target sheet which they take to lessons and complete themselves.

Considerable pastoral support is also provided both in house by activities such as peer mentoring and by the schools' regular engagement with external agencies including provision for drama therapy and counselling.

5.5 The Literacy Hour demands a set amount of whole-class teaching, as well as increased emphasis on phonics, both of which may present problems for these children. To help make the Literacy Hour accessible teachers can:

- involve EAL staff in the planning of Literacy Hours, ideally planning the lessons together;
- choose texts with clear print and clear illustrations;
- choose texts that are representative of all children's backgrounds and experiences;
- use the home language when introducing new words and texts. Dictionaries and glossaries can be obtained in many different languages;
- use bilingual classroom assistants/teachers to introduce a new text to pupils, for example by telling the story or explaining the text in the home language, or introducing new texts in a short warm-up session;
- support the introduction of new texts with visual aids and artefacts;
- provide lots of guided support by getting children to produce story boards for a particular text, or use writing frames;
- encourage parents to listen to their children read new books;

- revisit texts in paired reading sessions, pairing bilingual learners with fluent speakers of English;
- spend more time discussing the meanings of words, especially examples of idiomatic language;
- use sentence level work to develop children's understanding of grammar such as tense and the use of prepositions.

5.6 Teachers may also have to adapt Numeracy Hour teaching strategies and may find the following useful:

- using visual clues such as flash cards, to help the learning of new words;
- planning some questions that are specifically targeted at pupils in the early stages of learning English;
- getting children to repeat answers to problems in sentences;
- where there are after-school clubs, new arrivals can be encouraged to attend these to consolidate their mathematical learning.

5.7 Where examinations exist, asylum seeking and refugee children can be encouraged to study for GCSEs in subjects such as Turkish, Farsi, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish and Russian. LEAs could examine ways of sharing peripatetic language teachers across their boundaries. Neighbouring authorities could employ an Arabic language teacher, for example. Some groups of schools have organised and paid for home language teaching outside school hours, enabling pupils from several schools to attend.

5.8 Where pupils are unable to benefit from studying their home language, schools can still do much to value multilingualism. Teachers can ask students about their language backgrounds, and multilingualism be praised as a positive achievement. Pupils should feel that their teachers are genuinely interested in their languages. As well as samples of work in English, pupils' writing in their first language can be placed in their profile folders.

5.9 Schools should include home language and dual language books in class and school libraries, and encourage multilingual pupils to read them. Refugee community organisations and EAL teams should be able to tell teachers where they can obtain such books. Schools should purchase bilingual dictionaries for pupils.

6. Preparing all Pupils for Life in a Diverse Society

6.1 Research has found that a great many asylum seeking and refugee children report experiences of racial harassment in the school or home environs. Such experiences range from verbal abuse and spitting to physical attack.

6.2 Many incidents of racial harassment go unreported. This is made more likely by lack of English and a real fear some pupils may have of authorities like the police, based on experiences in their home country.

6.3 Schools are required to record all racist incidents and parents/carers and governors are to be informed of any incidents and the actions taken to deal with them. LEAs should be informed, annually, by Governing Bodies of the frequency and pattern of any such incidents.

6.4 Schools can use the curriculum to raise awareness about asylum seekers and refugees in a way that stresses their humanity - the arts in particular offer many opportunities.

6.5 The Key Stage 2 PSHE and Citizenship guidelines encourage pupils to be taught to appreciate the range of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the UK. Projects might include using the Literacy Hour, for example work on stories and testimonies; writing stories and accounts of migrations; interviewing and making presentations about relevant issues. Primary history projects can deal with the growth of multi-ethnic UK; the era of the Second World War; local history projects about migration and oral history of asylum seekers and refugees.

6.6 At Key Stages 3 and 4 the statutory Citizenship Programme of Study obliges pupils to understand the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the UK and the need for mutual respect and understanding. The opportunity to examine the issue of the migration and settlement of asylum seekers and refugees can be examined in many different parts of the curriculum. For example, in the secondary English curriculum pupils can develop their speaking and listening skills by role-play and debate about relevant issues, presenting information, negotiation. Pupils can be given non-fictional texts to read such as newspapers articles, autobiographies, diaries, letters and leaflets. Pupils/students can develop writing skills by setting out to inform others about asylum seekers and refugees, or presenting written arguments, stories and narrative about them.

6.7 Such curricular projects need to be implemented sensitively in schools where there are asylum seekers and refugee pupils. The children may not want to talk about their home country or family circumstances because they are worried about family left at home, or because they feel that it might jeopardise their chances of staying in the UK or eventually returning home. They may not want to be made to feel different from other children. There are many ways of making them feel secure, while at the same time increasing the knowledge of all pupils, such as inviting members of asylum seekers and refugee communities to talk to pupils or celebrating Refugee Week.

6.8 In the interests of promoting respectful and harmonious race relations it is important that the school's curriculum pays particular regard to the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Care needs to be taken to ensure a sensitive and accurate representation of religious diversity.

7. Working Together: School, Home and Community

7.1 Establishing strong links with parents is an essential part of supporting the education of asylum seeking and refugee pupils. The most successful of schools that work with these pupils are those that foster a high level of parental participation. Such school usually have good links with other agencies, including refugee community groups.

7.2 Some parents, however, have few links with their child's school. Some schools also report that it is difficult to develop links with a pupil's home. It is worth considering some of the reasons for such problems:

- parents who are newly arrived in the UK may be unfamiliar with the workings of the education system, having come from countries where there is little parental participation in education and events such as parents/carers evenings are unfamiliar;
- past experiences in the home country may make these parents suspicious of authority and wary of contact with schools;
- language is another factor preventing parental participation; over 70 per cent of adult asylum seekers arrive in the UK speaking little or no English. Positive home/school liaison policies should take these issues into account.

7.3 Schools that have developed strong links with asylum seeking and refugee parents are those with a welcoming ethos that:

- makes all parents feel that they are wanted and have a positive role to play;
- shows parents that they can always make their feelings and opinions known to staff, and that these will be dealt with respectfully and seriously;
- demonstrates that parents/carers' linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds are valued and respected;
- shows that the school is part of the community it serves.

7.4 It is important to be sensitive to the different care arrangements within communities - not all children are cared for by their parents. Schools need to check with whom a child lives and ensure that sensitivity is shown when invitations to 'parents' evenings' are sent out.

7.5 Schools may wish to consider the following:

- ensuring that essential information is translated and bilingual classroom

assistants or interpreters are used for school admission interviews, assessments, SEN review meetings and parents' evenings;

- working with other schools and/or the LEA to prepare welcome booklets which explain about the education system and the school. Model school letters can be prepared and translated, for such things as invitations to parents/ carers evenings;
- organising social events such as a coffee morning for parents/carers who are new to the locality;
- inviting parents/carers to help in the school's activities - many have skills that can usefully be employed in schools;
- recruiting staff such as educational welfare officers and teachers with a home/school liaison brief from refugee communities. Such bilingual staff could be shared between neighbouring LEAs that have only a few asylum seeking or refugee pupils.

7.6 All schools must have a member of staff with overall responsibility for child protection, as well as a member of staff with responsibility for children in public care. It is essential that they are aware of the needs of asylum seeking and refugee children.

7.7 As many asylum seeking and refugee families experience multiple social needs, schools need to develop good links with other agencies from the statutory and voluntary sector. Such agencies include:

- refugee support and EAL teams within the LEA;
- local FE colleges and other organisations offering English language classes and training for adults;
- the police;
- housing providers;
- social service teams;
- GPs surgeries and any healthcare projects working with asylum seekers and refugees;
- local organisations offering advice and advocacy;
- local multi-agency refugee fora;
- refugee community organisations.

7.8 Many refugee community organisations have been able to offer advice and support to schools. They may offer long-term support and help asylum seekers and

refugees to gain control over their own lives. Refugee community organisations vary in size and in the activities they perform. Some have paid staff; others depend on volunteers. Some refugee communities are supported by successful and well-organised community groups. Other communities, for example, Eastern European Roma, are less well represented by community groups. Some refugee community organisations represent specific ethnic, political or religious groups from particular countries. Schools must be sensitive to these differences and be aware that many newly arrived asylum seekers may be wary of community groups and individuals from their home country.

7.9 It is important that schools develop good links with refugee community organisations in their locality. If a school wishes to improve the involvement of refugee parents in its activities, it can ask the relevant community groups to encourage asylum seeking and refugee parents to respond to the school's overtures. Refugee community groups can sometimes provide interpreters to mediate in an emergency. They can also be invited to speak to pupils or be involved in activities such as cooking, storytelling and other cultural or awareness-raising projects. Schools can research and list local community organisations and individual refugees who could be invited in to help.

Among the services offered by refugee community organisations are:

- advice on immigration law, welfare rights and housing;
- English language classes, employment training and careers advice;
- supplementary schools for children, teaching the home language and sometimes English, maths, cultural activities, sports and religion;
- youth clubs;
- senior citizens' clubs;
- women's groups;
- cultural events and outings;
- the production of newsletters and information.

One London local authority has been able to secure statutory funding for 13 English language classes for parents. All of the classes are based in the schools their children attend and run in school hours during term time. Most parents who attend these classes are asylum seekers or refugees.

A school with a large number of Kosovan children provided a room for parents to meet. A refugee community organisation and a community school teaching Albanian have grown out of the parents' meetings.

A large secondary school with a high proportion of refugee children decided to monitor attendance at parents/carers evenings. It was found that few Turkish and

Kurdish parents attended these meetings. After this, the school took on a trilingual classroom assistant who spoke Kurdish and Turkish. As well as working to settle in new arrivals, his services were used at parents' evenings and to translate letters to the home. Parental attendance at school events, by both mothers and fathers, improved after this.

8. Supporting Vulnerable Groups of Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children

8.1 While the attainment of minority ethnic pupils is improving in the UK and many asylum seeking and refugee pupils are among high achievers, there is growing evidence that some groups do underachieve. These groups include:

- many unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children;
- children who arrive in the UK late in their education careers with little or no prior education;
- Somali pupils;
- Turkish Kurdish boys;
- Eastern European Roma pupils.

8.2 Unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children may underachieve because they may lack the guidance and support that families may offer. In recognition of the underachievement of children in public care, the DfES and the Department of Health published good practice guidance on the education of children in public care, including statutory recommendations. Children cared for by a local authority social services department may be entitled to:

- an individual education plan;
- a named person in a school and also an LEA who has responsibility for coordinating their education;
- an entitlement, if moved, not to be out of educational provision for more than 20 days, unless in emergencies.

8.3 The reasons for underachievement among some asylum seeking and refugee groups are complex. Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 schools should be analysing attainment data in a way that highlights underachievement of minority ethnic pupils, including any with asylum seeking and refugee backgrounds.

8.4 Where a group is underachieving, the school and LEA should plan a clear strategy for raising the attainment of that group. Projects to raise the achievement of underachieving groups may include:

- the use of bilingual/bicultural mentors to guide pupils;

- ensuring that pupils have good pastoral care;
- work to improve parental involvement in education;
- after school and vacation projects with study support;
- EAL support.

8.5 Asylum seeking and refugee children who arrive in the UK with an interrupted prior education are among the most educationally vulnerable. As well as being in a strange country, children with interrupted prior education may feel frustrated or inadequate because of their inability to read, write or complete other tasks, their lack of opportunity to handle, choose and read books, and be unfamiliar with classroom equipment and furniture.

8.6 A number of local authorities and schools have developed specific projects to address the needs of this group. Good practice piloted by such schools and LEAs includes:

- having a dedicated teaching room for small group teaching;
- ensuring that EAL assessments on entry to school pick up children with interrupted education, by asking children and their carers about prior education and getting children to complete tasks or write in their home language(s);
- ensuring that there is a clear progression pathway for young people arriving aged 14 plus with limited prior education. This might include provision of access to GCSE courses;
- ensuring that teaching material reflects the real experiences of secondary aged children. Books aimed at young children do nothing for older children's interest and self-esteem, but there is more appropriate teaching material targeted at older children with reading difficulties. Alternatively, desk-top publishing equipment can be used to scan and adapt teaching material for younger children as appropriate.

8.7 Another vulnerable group is asylum seeking and refugee children whose experiences of persecution prevent them from settling into a new school. Such children may manifest disturbed behaviour. It is important to be aware of some of the past experiences of asylum seeking and refugee children. Such experiences may include:

- the loss of parents, other key carers, brothers and sisters, extended family and friends;
- the loss of home, material belongings, toys and familiar surroundings;
- high intensity war, bombing or shelling and perhaps the destruction of their

homes;

- separation from family;
- being arrested, detained, tortured or raped, or being forced to join armies or militias;
- grave shortages of food, water or other necessities;
- hostility in the new homeland;
- material deprivation in their new homes;
- being with people who do not understand or know about the violent events they have experienced.

8.8 After a traumatic experience such as bereavement, it is normal to manifest strong emotional reactions, but with time these usually lessen. Children's reactions to such events vary vastly in both the short and long term. Many factors influence psychological well-being. The duration and intensity of trauma, the child's age, the child's personality and character, the quality of childcare and the experiences in a new country all affect how the child will come to terms with being an asylum seeker and refugee. Certain adverse or risk factors make it more likely that problems will arise. Other protective factors help guard a child against long term psychological distress.

8.9 It is useful for teachers to think about adverse and protective factors when working with asylum seeking and refugee children. Schools and teachers who wish to promote well-being should try to maximise the protective factors in a child's life and minimise the adverse factors, as much as they have control over them, helping to make it less likely that a child will suffer long term psychological stress.

Factors include:

- having parents/carers and/or an extended family network who can give their children full attention and good quality childcare;
- having access to other people, particularly from their own community, who give friendship and support;
- having some understanding about the reasons for leaving their home country. Obviously younger children may have an incomplete understanding of such stressful experiences and be more vulnerable. Children who are able to integrate their experience into their belief system are less likely to suffer long-term distress, and those with high self-esteem are more likely to overcome traumatic events;
- being able to maintain some links with their homeland;
- remembering good things about life in the home country;

- being happy in a new school, making friends and being able to achieve at school;
- feeling optimistic about the future and about making progress are important protective factors;
- being able to talk about stressful events and thus gain control over them;
- being able to ask for help when things go wrong;
- having a hobby or interest to pursue.

8.10 Interventions vary according to the individual children. Some children may require rapid referral to an educational psychologist, to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, or specialist mental health project working with them. For other children school-based interventions may be sufficient to help them settle. School-based interventions may include Pastoral Support Programmes, counselling, mentoring and art therapy.

8.11 A school will need to examine its whole school policies for the pastoral care of asylum seeking and refugee pupils experiencing psychological problems. Providing emotional support for these children is an integral part of a school's policy and cannot be considered in isolation from matters such as providing a welcoming environment, good home/school liaison and EAL support. A school which meets a child's academic and social needs is one where that child will feel happy. Conversely, no amount of counselling will enable a child to feel happy if he or she is encountering racism at school or not making educational progress. Schools can consider the practical strategies set out below:

- Knowing when children are distressed and when to seek outside help. It is important for teachers to be observant and to know when children are distressed. Only then can appropriate support be given. Manifestations of some of the following behaviour may indicate that a child is deeply distressed:
 - losing interest and energy or being very withdrawn and taking little interest in surroundings;
 - being aggressive or feeling very angry. Children can manifest aggressive behaviour for a number of reasons. Some children copy the violence they have seen around them. Young children may be unable to put their feelings into words so use violence as an outlet. Traumatic experiences can also make children feel tense and irritable, and they may lose their temper easily;
 - lacking concentration and feeling restless. Children who are worried or unhappy often find it difficult to concentrate on their work. They may daydream, become withdrawn or restless;
 - feeling very irritable;

- having intrusive thoughts about traumatic events;
 - acting out stressful events or problems in their thoughts and in their play and drawings. Playing out such events enables them to develop understanding of these events and gain control over difficult emotions. When children play out violent or traumatic events time and time again it indicates that they are not getting over the experience;
 - physical symptoms such as poor appetite, eating too much, breathing difficulties, pains and dizziness;
 - losing recently acquired skills and faculties, for example keeping dry at night;
 - nightmares and disturbed sleep;
 - crying and feeling overwhelming sadness;
 - being nervous or fearful of certain things such as loud noises;
 - being unable to form relationships with other children, perhaps being too sad and withdrawn to want to play, or unable to trust other children. A newly arrived child might also not understand what other children are doing. These children may be isolated because they are rejected by other children, who see them as different or because of their disturbed behaviour;
 - having difficulty relating to adults because they mistrust them. Sometimes children keep away from adults because they fear loss: they are reluctant to show affection to a significant adult lest that person disappear.
- Working with parents. If a child experiences difficulties at school it is essential to develop good communications with parents and other key carers at once, using an interpreter if needed. Sometimes parents and children's problems may be closely interlinked. Leaving their home country often disrupts family relationships: children may lose parents or key carers. More frequently, children lose the attention of their parents, who may be so preoccupied by basic survival and their own problems that they cannot give young children the attention they need. Where parents are emotionally absent, it is important to ensure that they receive social support.
 - Ensuring that children and families have access to social and community support. For many asylum seekers and refugees isolation and lack of support are significant risk factors. If their children are experiencing difficulties at school, it is important to check that they and their families have the support of community groups, after-school clubs, access to playgroups and nurseries, befriending schemes and English classes. Successful psychological interventions for young children are often those which enhance parental

competence.

- **Training.** In-service training should aim to increase teachers', including Special Educational Needs Coordinators, knowledge about refugee children's background, and to develop their listening and communication skills. Specialist organisations such as the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture offer in-service training. Some teachers may also want to consider validated counselling courses.
- **Talking to children.** Many schools have well-planned pastoral care and one of the most important things a teacher can do is to talk to distressed children, listen to what they say and take their communication seriously. To do so, the teacher or mentor has to make a regular time to be free. A room or an office which affords privacy should be set aside at break time or after school. Staff need to consider their own listening and communicating skills.
- **Counselling.** A small number of asylum seeking and refugee children will need more intervention. Some schools offer individual or group counselling to children who have suffered abuse or stressful experiences, usually facilitated by teachers who have obtained counselling qualifications or by other professionals. However not all societies have the same attitude towards counselling services and some families may view counselling as inappropriate.
- **Play.** Those who work with younger children can use play with individuals and small groups of children to make sense of their experiences, explore issues such as fear and trust and help newly-arrived children settle in.
- **Autobiography and creative writing.** Children can be encouraged to write about themselves, their home country and present circumstances, keep a diary or make a scrapbook or picture book about themselves. Such autobiographical techniques are frequently used with asylum seeking and refugee children and help develop understanding of complex events and feelings. Younger children can use paints and crayons to draw about themselves, and work with an adult to write down captions to their drawings.
- **Art and drama can be utilised in the same ways as creative writing and play:** to enable children to express themselves and develop understanding of complex events and feelings. Art therapy is extensively used in the health service and a growing number of art therapists are also facilitating work with asylum seeking and refugee children. There are times and places where a Registered Art Therapist should be used - for work with very disturbed children, for example. Primary school teachers, art teachers and care workers can be trained to use art with asylum seeking and refugee children in ways that help them settle. Useful techniques include:
 - self portraits;
 - mask production and discussion of facial feature and feelings;
 - the Desert Island - here children work in groups of four or five around a

large sheet of paper, painting the items they would wish to bring to their desert island. There is space for painting personal items as well as communal space for children to paint together. The activity is a good prompt for talk.

Art Therapy for Groups is an excellent resource for such activities. Drama and puppetry can be used similarly, to express feelings and reflect on events. Drama allows children to communicate ideas and feelings that would be too difficult to say directly.

- The pastoral curriculum. Bereavement will affect everyone at some time in their lives and learning about loss, death and bereavement is important. Some schools have excellent resources about bereavement for use in religious education or personal and social education. Schools need to use the pastoral curriculum, PSHE and citizenship to examine bereavement and loss. In this way asylum seeking and refugee children will not feel different and will realise that other children also have bad experiences.

The London Borough of Camden provided a dynamic, weekly, small-group drama session for vulnerable asylum seeker and refugee pupils. The pupils were withdrawn from PSHE once a week to attend small group sessions. Through role play and games, they experimented with concepts of control, trust, collaboration and choices. The evaluation of this project, which ran for 10 weeks, showed that pupils' confidence and self esteem had grown, they were more able to focus on their learning and became more included and engaged with their peers.

The London Borough of Enfield has established a Child Guidance Service Refugee Team, a multi-disciplinary service funded by Education and health, which comprises 2 Educational Psychologists, a Mental Health Practitioner and Bi-lingual Family Liaison Officer. The team offers:

- Application of psychology in the community, creating links to the Child Guidance Service, and offers outreach work to help support families and children from asylum seeking/refugee backgrounds;
- Both individual and group therapy work;
- Liaison between the Educational Psychologists, key advisors and school improvement officers from the EMA team, to help raise achievement of ethnic minorities and effect change at borough wide level, and help schools understand the psychological impact of trauma, refugee experience and how to support the pupils and families needs.

Websites and useful information

Refugee Council www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Commission for Racial Equality www.cre.gov.uk

Local Government Association www.lga.gov.uk

- London Borough of Haringey has produced bilingual teaching material in many languages including Albanian, Czech and Turkish.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority www.qca.org.uk

Department for Education and Employment (2000) National Literacy Strategy: Supporting Pupils Learning English as an Additional Language, London: DfEE

Department of Health (2000) Guidance on The Education of Children Being Looked After by Local Authorities, Circular LAC (2000) 13, London: Department of Health and DfEE

Department for Education and Employment (1999) Social Inclusion: Pupil Support, London: DfEE

OFSTED (2001) Managing Support for the Attainment of Pupils from Minority Ethnic Groups, London: OFSTED

OFSTED (2001) Raising the Achievement of Young People in Public Care, London: OFSTED

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2000) Citizenship at Key Stage 3 and 4, London: QCA

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2000) A Language in Common, London: QCA

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2000) PHSE and Citizenship at Key Stage 1 and 2, London: QCA

Refugee Council (2000) Helping Refugee Children in Schools, London: Refugee Council

Refugee Council and Save the Children (2001) In Safe Hands: a video training pack for those working with young refugee children, London: Refugee Council and Save the Children

Rutter, J. (2001) Supporting Refugee Children in 21st century Britain, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

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