

Refugee and asylum seeker children in UK schools

Schools and early years settings are often very positive about how the presence of refugee children has enriched the life of the school community and the learning environment. Refugee families are supportive of schools and their children can be highly motivated to learn and make progress.

There is no completely accurate national and local demographic data on the numbers of asylum-seeking and refugee children in the UK. Published data on asylum applications in the UK does not include numbers of dependants or break dependants down by age group. In 2003, the Refugee Council estimated that there were almost 99,000 refugee children of compulsory school age.

The largest national group of refugee children are Somalis. Other significant groups are Sri Lankan Tamils, Turkish nationals, Albanian speakers, Zimbabweans, Iraqis, Afghans and Iranians. The local authority with the largest population of refugee children is the London Borough of Newham, with 7,128 refugee children, followed by Haringey and the City of Manchester. The London Borough of Haringey has the highest proportion of refugee children in the UK, with 19.4 per cent of the school role being refugees.

Local authorities with more than 2,000 asylum-seeker and refugee children in schools are Barnet, Brent, Camden, Ealing, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Hounslow, Islington, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Westminster, Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham.

Refugee children in Britain are a diverse group. Some children may arrive in the UK with both parents; others may only have one parent caring for them. Some children may live with older brothers and sisters, or with relatives and friends. Other children [arrive alone and unaccompanied, without a parent or carer](#)

Schools and early years providers play a vital role in promoting the well-being of refugee children, helping them to rebuild their self-esteem and friendships, and achieve with their learning. Teachers and early years professionals have developed considerable experience in working with refugee children and their families. They have become increasingly aware of their needs, and the necessity for professionals from different services to work closely together.

Local authorities (LAs) have a duty to provide full-time education for all children of compulsory school age resident in that LA, as outlined in Section 14 of the Education Act 1996. Asylum-seeker and refugee children aged 5-16 have the same entitlement to full-time education as other children in the UK.

LAs also have other legal duties, including:

- To offer school places in accordance with their published admissions arrangements. LAs must ensure that there are no unreasonable delays in securing school admission for refugee and asylum seeker children.
- LAs and schools have to comply with both the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which make discrimination on school admissions and school places on the grounds of race unlawful. The latter Act also requires LAs and schools to monitor the impact of their practice (which will include school admission policies) on minority ethnic groups and positively promote good race relations.
- A duty to provide additional support for asylum-seeker and refugee children who are looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act (1989). All looked after children must have a personal education plan within their care plan, and schools have a responsibility to designate a named person to co-ordinate their educational provision.

Good practice

Be aware of refugee and asylum-seeker children

Both LAs and schools are required to demonstrate an awareness of diverse groups, including refugee and asylum-seeker children. The Ofsted Framework for Inspecting Schools (2003) requires Ofsted inspectors to identify 'the profile of pupils, particularly the identity and proportion of minority ethnic groups represented in the school in significant numbers, including pupils from refugee and Gypsy/Traveller families.'

Effective admission and induction procedures for all new arrivals in schools and early years settings can provide teachers with opportunities to identify which children are likely to be from a refugee and asylum-seeker background. The process of identification, however, should not be a bureaucratic exercise that is intrusive and uncomfortable for parents and carers. It is not necessary for schools to ask to see immigration and asylum documents (although families may choose to show these if they have no other form of identification), nor ask parents, carers or pupils direct questions about their immigration status.

The information that schools gather for all new entrants is often sufficient for identifying refugee and asylum-seeker children. A child's country of origin, their ethnic background and the language(s) spoken by a family are very good pointers.

Ensure refugee children access their entitlement to education and other services and benefits

Refugee and asylum-seeker children and young people often find it harder to access education compared with other groups. Some children have been left without school places for long periods of time.

It is essential that refugee children are provided with support and advocacy to enable them to enrol in school as quickly as possible. Effective advocacy may include explaining school admission procedures, giving help with forms, making phone calls and providing support during admission interviews. Schools should also ensure that interpretation is provided when necessary.

Develop whole school approaches to supporting refugee children

Teachers provide effective support for refugee children when there is a clear whole school commitment to inclusion and race equality. Ofsted have identified that headteachers and senior managers have a clear role to play in reinforcing a welcoming ethos and ensuring that schools review the effectiveness of their practice.

Support for refugee children is not a task for a small group of teachers working in isolation. Nor is it the sole responsibility of staff funded by the Ethnic Minority Achievement or Vulnerable Children Grants.

Schools with effective practice ensure that all school staff, including teachers, teaching assistants, learning mentors, office staff, student teachers and others, work together in co-ordinated ways. The school's commitment to genuine inclusion of refugee children will be reflected in its policies and actions plans for ethnic minority achievement and race equality.

Frequently asked questions

How do I go about doing a survey of refugee and asylum-seeker pupils?

The starting point for schools is to have effective admission and induction procedures for all new arrivals that ensures that accurate information on pupils is collected [when they start school](#)

All schools are now required to collect and record data on pupils' ethnic backgrounds for local purposes and for the Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census (PLASC). Ethnic background data must be collected according to the categories in the 2001 national population Census categories. The ethnicity categories along with information on child's home language provide helpful pointers for identifying children who may be from a refugee or asylum seeker background. Some LEAs have also agreed additional ethnicity categories that reflect the diversity of their area.

Are refugee and asylum-seeker children entitled to free school meals?

Children are entitled to free school meals if their parents receive:

- Income Support (IS)
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance (IBJSA)
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Child Tax Credit, but who are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and whose annual income (as assessed by the Inland Revenue) does not exceed £13,230 are entitled to free school meals.

Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act is provided by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and local authority social services departments through the interim support scheme. Families receiving either NASS support or social services asylum support can apply for free school meals in the same way as any other families who are entitled.

Children who receive IS or IBJSA in their own right are also entitled to free school meals.

It is social services' responsibility to pay for school meals for unaccompanied asylum seeker children looked after under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

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Online Resources

http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/cms-service/stream/asset/?asset_id=42951

Camden Refugee Education Policy Guidelines: Developing a School Policy to Meet the Educational Needs of Refugee Children

<http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=90033>

Information on refugee children's legal rights and entitlements.

Children's Legal Centre - Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children's Project.

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/collecting/>

DfES: The Standards Site- Collecting and Using data. Guidance on collecting and using ethnicity data.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode>

DfES Code of Practice on School Admissions. Annex B of the School Admissions Code of Practice provides guidance on the admission of children from overseas.

<http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk>

DfES Parent Centre. Information on free school meals entitlements can be found by clicking on the 'School life' link and then the link to 'School administration'.

<http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?ContentId=384>

Multiverse: Statistics on Asylum-Seeking & Refugee Children in Schools 2003.

References and Further Reading

Greater London Authority (2004) *Offering more than they borrow: Refugee children in London*. London : GLA. Retrieved on 24th September, 2005 from:

http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/refugees/docs/labyrinth_report.pdf

National Children's Bureau (2003) *The Education of Refugee Children - Policy and practice in the education of refugee and asylum-seeker children in England*. London : NCB Pupil Inclusion Unit. Retrieved on 24th September, 2005 from: http://www.ncb.org.uk/resources/res_detail.asp?id=385

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