



**Welcoming refugee
children and young
people to our schools**

‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.’

Hebrews 13:2

You will be aware how stretched the various support services already are. Recent experience suggests that after the initial placement, the support you receive is likely to be limited. As one headteacher said: ‘get comfortable with just thinking along the lines of “muddle through and do the best you can and be comfortable with it”’. This paper is based on conversations with school leaders with very recent experience and is intended to share best practice.

“Safeguarding first - trust God to sort out the rest!”

Know your own school

Look at the support your school is able to provide. Schools of Sanctuary suggests:

“We would recommend schools looking at our brand new resource pack and also using our audit tool to reflect on the different areas of school practice, taking a holistic approach - both available here:

schools.cityofsanctuary.org/resources”

Refugee funding queries:

Sspo.dfe@education.gov.uk

First steps

- Meet with the families and children/young people as soon as possible. Use an interpreter for the initial meeting.
- Provide information, ideally translated or using images, of the school and arrange for uniform to be allocated

Consider a familiarisation visit to the school out of normal hours with some current pupils and staff in attendance

Engage your current pupils and families

- Hold a values assembly to ask pupils how the school could make the new pupils feel welcome in their school
- Put pupil suggestions into operation: eg make picture signs for the toilets, cloakrooms, hall, classroom equipment etc, learn some of the new pupil’s native language.
- Communicate with parents in a positive way and identify any who may have appropriate language skills

Prepare a short video message for your new pupils. Make sure you have general media permissions for your existing pupils so you can use any footage as you wish.

Age appropriate news coverage for pupils on BBC Newsround:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround>

Advice if you are upset by the news:

[Advice if you’re upset by the news - CBBC Newsround](#)

Practical help

Offer the practical resources that the child or young person needs to start at your school and integrate. As a minimum consider giving the new pupil:

- A full set of new uniform including PE kit
- A robust pair of school shoes that meet your school uniform requirements
- Trainers/plimsolls for PE
- Bag, pencil case and supplies eg calculator, maths set
- Basic sanitary supplies (if appropriate)
- A welcome pack to your school – include anything you feel will help them eg photos or a map of the school site, information on the school day, photos of staff, welcome letters from future classmates, etc – keep it visual as far as possible

“Our experience so far has been incredibly positive and welcoming the children and families into our school family has added a real richness to our school.”

Get to know the pupils and tailor support

Get good at writing risk assessments. If a child's mental health is at risk, for example, write a robust risk assessment setting out clearly what has been put in place and send to all relevant parties.

“Be kind - often that's enough. Accept that it is okay for them to not be okay. You can't fix what they have been through.”

• Cultural acclimatisation

Research cultural differences and things to prepare for. Basic research will highlight areas where you could inadvertently offend!

Engage pupils in a wide range of activities both inside and outside of school.

Look at your school dinner provision and whether it will suit your new pupils. They may have specific cultural expectations that will need consideration by your caterers. Consider inviting the new parents in to look at the menu and sample the food.

• Emotional needs

Refugee children and young people may have experienced a wide range of events. Understand what their needs are so that you can provide appropriate support. If you have a school counsellor, look at making them accessible to your refugee children and young people.

Drawing and Talking is a therapeutic intervention that can be used with children as well as adults; it can provide a good way in for children with little language. Training a member of staff is another cost effective approach: <https://drawingandtalking.com>

Bereavement

ODBE has compiled a resource pack to give school leaders support and ideas when dealing with this sensitive situation:

[Oxford Diocesan Board of Education | Bereavement and Loss \(odbe.org.uk\)](https://www.odbe.org.uk)

Trauma

Many young refugees will experience trauma. Betsy de Thierry works with professionals including school staff to facilitate trauma recovery:

[Betsy Training UK](https://www.betsyde.com)

13 mins free training on all ages is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FV_EMgNaJ6Y

Betsy says:

“I would suggest that any behaviour or expression of emotion that seems big or weird or any sadness or zoning out points to them needing some safe, gentle 1:1 time where they can play a few games and feel 'known' by an adult who definitely doesn't talk about the war but can make space to answer any questions, but mostly just by being kind, validating and recognising that they have had a tough time... 45 mins a week of a few kids playing/ being/making will help them feel safer.”

• English language skills

Look to recruit a specialist teacher on a temporary contract to teach pupils EAL in small groups.

Research EAL programmes such as Racing to English www.racingtoenglish.co.uk

The programme could be led by a teaching assistant or teacher.

The EAL Inclusion Hub has a wealth of resources and welcome ideas. Although it is a subscription service it is extremely cost effective:

<https://www.inclusionhub.co.uk/welcome-to-eal/>

Identify any parents or members of the local community who may have relevant language skills. Ask them to volunteer to talk to refugee pupils to help their language skills.

Link with a secondary school with a good EAL programme which may be able to provide support.

• Educational support

The Bell Foundation has a wealth of guidance. Their webinar Welcoming Refugee Children: Advice and Guidance for Schools can be viewed on YouTube: [Welcoming Refugee Children: Advice and Guidance for Schools \(Webinar\) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

There is also a page on their website: [Welcoming Refugee and Asylum Seeking Learners](https://www.bellfoundation.org.uk/welcoming-refugee-and-asylum-seeking-learners)

The Bell Foundation has developed [The Great Ideas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) pages on its website which are a collection of different strategies that any teacher could use in their classrooms to support learners who use EAL – see the [‘Great Ideas’ YouTube playlist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

It explains ‘Substitution Tables’ and how they can be used by practitioners in an integrated classroom to scaffold the language needed for curriculum learning: [whole webinar](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Refugee Education UK has a variety of practitioner advice sheets, toolkits and other resources available aimed at supporting refugee children and young people to access the level of education that is right for them: <https://www.reuk.org>

Practical suggestions:

- Buddy the refugee pupil with another child or young person to support them in the classroom.
- Get pupils to do a project for the first few weeks about themselves, producing a booklet with information such as: hair colour, eye colour, favourite food, favourite colour, favourite subject etc.
- Have a session every day, say for one hour, when the new pupils go out of the class to work on their English.
- For the majority of the time, pupils are in class learning alongside their peers. At this point it is great to see the collaboration between the pupils who are brilliant at overcoming any language barrier.

Teachers:

- It is useful to have 'filler activities' that the new pupils can do independently if the curriculum learning is inaccessible. Resources are available from Twinkl, for example, which has a lot of EAL resources.
- Keeping expectations for behaviour high is important, whilst also being compassionate about their situation. All pupils need to know that things are 'fair' in order to make and maintain meaningful friendships.
- Be mindful of things that may seem trivial to adults but are huge for children. Refugee children and young people may have a survival instinct that meant they were used to needing to be at the front of a situation. Don't allow a refugee pupil to 'push in' just to placate them: the other children need to know that their needs are not being overlooked.

Support the refugee parents

Lack of support from parents for their children is a common challenge which may arise due to a variety of barriers such as their own traumatic experiences, etc. It is likely that the parents of refugee children/young people will have limited English.

The Bell Foundation has posted translated documents in a range of languages which explain the UK schools process to their website:

[Parental Involvement - The Bell Foundation \(bell-foundation.org.uk\)](https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/)

If you have an EAL teaching resource base in your school, consider offering language courses for parents.

Language Learning Link classes are run by volunteers who work with small groups of people to help them improve their English language skills. Lessons currently take place online so are very accessible:

<https://www.llinks.org/>

Engage your community

Welcoming a refugee child or young person to your school is a community activity!

Ask your local church or wider community for practical help such as donations of essentials or crowdfunding to provide transport or extracurricular activities.

Buddy up children with refugee children. Young children in particular pick up languages very quickly: get other pupils to help with communication when language is still potentially a barrier.

Get in touch with other schools who have had refugees to ask questions and support each other.

Other external support

There are various charities and organisations that provide support, information and advice to refugees and migrants and which will also engage with schools.

Oxfordshire - Asylum Welcome:

[Home - Asylum welcome \(asylum-welcome.org\)](https://www.asylum-welcome.org/)

Berkshire - Reading Refugee Support Group:

<https://rrsg.org.uk>

Slough and surrounding areas - Slough Refugee Support:

www.sloughrefugeesupport.org.uk

About Settled provides support and advice to EU citizens:

www.settled.org.uk

Accreditation:

Once you have successfully worked with refugee children or young people, consider accreditation.

NASUWT Refugee Welcome School accreditation:

<https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/news/campaigns/refugee-welcome-schools.html?s=03>

School of Sanctuary:

[Become a School of Sanctuary \(cityofsanctuary.org\)](https://www.cityofsanctuary.org)

“They are all speaking quite a lot of English now and making very good adjustments socially. The families also have a strong relationship with us and we regularly taxi them to school events etc. They feel very much part of our diverse community and the other parents make them very welcome.”