

Children in care to be helped into independent schools

Next steps in Government's ambition to improve educational outcomes and boost aspirations for the most vulnerable young people in society.



More children growing up in care are to benefit from places at the top private schools, as well as mentoring and access to sports and music facilities, in an aim to improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children.

Ten teams will work across the country to identify opportunities in independent schools for young people in care, where it is suitable to meet their needs, Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi is expected to announce in a speech today (4 July) at the Association of Directors of Children's Services conference.

The new programme, backed by £500,000, aims to improve access to the top independent schools and builds on Minister Zahawi's commitment to see as many as 1,000 independent schools involved in schemes that offer opportunities to children in care.

Minister Nadhim Zahawi will also lay down a marker to Directors of Children's Services to drive forward the programme and engage with the new teams, to make sure councils can identify children who could benefit quickly when private schools set out offers of support.

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

Every child, whatever their background, should have access to an education that helps them to fulfil their potential. We know that all too often children who have experienced trauma in their life can fall behind in education, through no fault of their own.

While standards in state schools continue to rise, I want independent schools and Directors of Children's Services to play a greater role in helping raise outcomes for these vulnerable children. A number around the country are already making fantastic offers to children in care, but I want more to come forward and councils to take up the opportunities. I am clear that this cannot be put off any longer, and I will accept no less.

This is now about providing resources to councils to identify and place children where it is right for them. Together, we can and must increase access, improve opportunities and foster aspirations and belief in what looked after children can achieve.

Independent schools will also provide sporting and music facilities for looked after children, to help harness specific aspirations or talents, such as swimming or music, to help boost opportunities, outcomes and aspirations for these young people.

The service will bring together 10 teams across the country into hubs of bringing in schools, local authorities, virtual school heads and social workers to help find suitable places for children in care.

Chairman of the Independent Schools Council, Barnaby Lenon, said:

The all-round education and pastoral care offered by independent schools can be transformational for a young person and many schools are already supporting vulnerable children.

The independent education sector is committed to playing its part in our diverse national education system to help give more children the best start, regardless of background. We are working with the Government and, although there is a limit to what we can do, independent schools are providing life-changing bursaries and working ever-closer with our state school partners to unlock new educational opportunities.

The announcement builds on a 10-year project run by the Boarding Schools Partnerships and Norfolk County Council, where young people who were either in care or at risk of going into care were taken off the council's risk register after at least three years in a boarding school. A higher proportion of looked-after children who were at boarding schools achieved A* to C grades in GCSE maths and English, compared to all looked-after children in 2016.