

A Practical Toolkit for Supporting Refugee and Asylum-Seekers in Secondary Schools

Education - Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)

Floor 1, Core 6

Civic Offices

Guildhall Square

Portsmouth

PO1 2AL

T: 023 9273 3130

karen.thomas.emas@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Introduction

This guidance was produced by the Portsmouth Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS), in conjunction with the Virtual School, in response to the growing numbers of refugee and asylum-seeking pupils arriving in the city and beyond.

These young people, often unaccompanied, arrive in our secondary schools with sometimes very little notice and teachers and pastoral staff will often ask for guidance and support from us in a myriad of situations. We hope that this guidance goes some way to addressing the concerns of staff and will enable schools to provide as positive a welcome and as full an education as they can.

The guidance comprises this short introductory booklet and then a series of separate 'advice and information' cards which can be used to focus on different aspects of school provision.

Year Leaders or Heads of Houses will be interested in the admission and induction advice, whereas an Inclusion Manager may like to refer to guidance on interventions and ESOL-style support. Senior Leaders wanting to consider their whole school ethos with regard to refugees and asylum-seekers can look at this, whilst all teaching staff may want to refer to the different teaching strategies cards.

As such, the cards are provided individually both in hard copy and in electronic form and can be photocopied individually for ease of use by different staff in school.

Great care has been taken to ensure that the information provided is correct at time of production. However, all information will need to be considered in the current climate of change, for example asylum processes and GCSE access arrangements are both liable to be updated frequently. It is for this reason that no statistics are included for the languages and countries of origin of the young refugees and asylum-seekers in our schools.

Throughout this resource, the refugee and asylum-seeking young men and women are referred to as 'the pupil' and the pronoun 'they' has been used as shorthand.

Karen Thomas
Portsmouth EMAS Lead Adviser
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One asylum-seeker's experience...

Tesfai (not his real name) is an unaccompanied asylum-seeker from Eritrea. He arrived in the UK at the start of Year 11, having come from a rural area in the lowlands of his country, where he lived on a smallholding with his mother and younger sister. He attended school from the age of six and is literate in three languages (Bilen, Tigrinya and Arabic) and is a Christian.

Tesfai's father was taken as a political prisoner some years before and his brother suffered awfully as a child soldier, eventually escaping but mentally broken. Tesfai left as his own conscription became imminent, forced to do so by his mother so that he could escape the same fate as his brother.

His journey to the UK is familiar. Tesfai left home alone, aged 14, and walked for seven days, eventually arriving in Sudan. From Khartoum, he was taken by Land Cruiser across the desert to Egypt and then onwards across the Mediterranean by boat to Italy. He finally ended up in the 'Jungle' at Calais for a month before coming to the UK in the back of a lorry and claiming asylum in Portsmouth. His entire journey, taken initially alone until he joined up with some other migrants, took Tesfai seven months.

Speaking mainly through his interpreter, he described his welcome, induction and first steps to acquiring English and explained what helped him.

On the first visit to his new school:

"That was really bad...it's the first time that I had ever seen such a big school. It didn't look like a school but like a court! I panicked but I started to calm down. I didn't understand anything that anyone was saying but I felt that they were good people as they were trying to help me, show me the school. My BLA (the EMAS Bilingual Learning Assistant) really helped but when she left, I felt so lonely. I couldn't speak to anyone."

On the next visit:

"I was really worried and anxious. What if my interpreter isn't there? What can I do? The school allowed my support worker to come with me to settle me in...I told him that I wasn't going in without him! Even though we couldn't really communicate (he only speaks English), I felt that he was always there for me, on my side."

On his first few days (in a small group setting):

"It was awful when the BLA wasn't there. There was so much information coming at me. I could cope with the BLA there but without her I was just confused. I had no idea what was going on, no-one in the room spoke to me and everyone just stared. Then some girls tried to speak to me but I couldn't answer them. I was so shy, I just said 'What you say?' but they didn't answer and that was that. But Miss kept smiling and her friendly face helped calm me down."

On going out into lessons:

"I went out just to PE at first, to play football. I didn't need to speak so that was OK but the following week I was so nervous again. My BLA forced me to go out to lessons! She did right! That gave me the confidence not to be alone, always by myself. If I had been put straight into class, with no-one to support me, then that would have been too difficult. It's really scary. You need someone to help you, to let

you know the system. I didn't know that I could ask for more work when I finished, so I just sat quietly until someone noticed"

On English schools:

"In some of the classes, the pupils just want to play, they aren't serious and don't want to learn new things. I feel more mature than the others sometimes and I really respect my teachers. In Eritrea, you can't even look at the teacher and you have to do exactly what they say. Here you have a lot of freedom."

On his initial assessment:

"I didn't mind talking about myself. At least the school knows about me, my background, my life, why I am here. I was scared though. I had to tell another person about me and I don't like talking about my problems. To be honest, if the BLA wasn't there, I wouldn't say a word but because I trusted her and she explained why it was good to do the assessment and that no-one would hurt me here, I did it. You meet so many people....you learn you can't trust everyone. When you do find someone you can trust, you can open your heart. It's a relief. You can give up your burden."

On English (ESOL-style) lessons:

"My teacher is really warm. I really learn with her. She repeats everything many times until she's confident that I have learnt it. I never thought that teachers could be like that."

On pastoral support:

"Some people will need help to cope with what they have been through, but before they can ask for help they have to trust the person that will help them. I talk to my BLA and my foster carer. It's better that I take the lead, I'll ask when I need to. You need to be patient, to build a relationship."

On the UK:

"God is so great. This is not our country but everyone here tries their best to help us and make us feel happy. Every day, I thank God for my school, everyone is so lovely and helpful and I am happy here."

The Advice and Information cards:

- Admission and induction
- Creating a welcoming environment
- Curriculum provision and classroom organisation
- Developing your whole school ethos
- GCSEs
- Health issues
- Initial assessment
- Interventions and ESOL-style support
- Maintaining, valuing and supporting first language
- Pastoral support
- Teaching strategies for pupils with very little or no English
- Teaching strategies for pupils who already speak some English
- The asylum-process
- Unaccompanied refugees and asylum-seekers
- Who are the refugees and asylum seekers?
- Who else can help?
- Working with interpreters

A glossary of terms concerning refugees and asylum-seekers (with thanks to UNICEF)

Asylum seeker – an asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum in a country and is awaiting a decision as to whether or not this will be granted. A person – adult or child – who is granted asylum becomes a refugee. In the UK, UK Visas and Immigration (part of the Home Office) deals with asylum applications. Most asylum seekers arriving into the UK are not allowed to work; those who are destitute are offered free housing and some financial support.

Best interests – the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires governments and others to treat the child's best interests as a primary consideration in all matters affecting the child. The child's best interests has long been part of UK law in relation to decision-making about individual children's welfare. The UK Parliament passed legislation in 2009, which brought the best interests of children into immigration and asylum decision-making.

Children – human beings below the age of 18.

Convention on the Rights of the Child – the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty that sets out the rights of all children, everywhere. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989. It contains 54 articles that encompass the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children are entitled to as well as what countries must do to ensure children can enjoy their rights. The Convention is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. The UK ratified it in 1991, thereby taking on its legal obligations.

Discretionary leave to remain – if a person's asylum application in the UK has failed, and they are not granted humanitarian protection, they may be given discretionary leave to remain. In the case of unaccompanied and separated children, discretionary leave is granted for three years, or until the child turns 17½, whichever period is the shorter.

Humanitarian protection – protection given to those who have not been granted refugee status, on the grounds that they face a serious risk to life or person arising from the death penalty, unlawful killing, or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Human rights – universally agreed entitlements aimed at everyone enjoying a safe, dignified and fulfilling life, without any discrimination and unnecessary impositions on their freedom. Different treaties define and protect different human rights, which are broadly separated into economic, social and cultural rights, and civil and political rights, but they are all inter-related. In the UK, successive governments have ratified international treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (in 1991) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (in 2009). The UK's Human Rights Act 1998 protects all of the rights in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which was agreed after the 1939-1945 War. The Human Rights Act enables UK residents to protect their rights through UK courts (instead of going to the European Court of Human Rights in France). The Act also requires public authorities, including schools, to act in accordance with the rights in the ECHR.

Human trafficking – the movement of a person from one place to another into conditions of exploitation. In England and Wales, legislation states a person is exploited if one or more of the following occur: they are held in slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour; they are sexually exploited; they are encouraged, required or expected to donate one or more of their organs; or they are subject to force, threats or deception so they will provide services or other benefits to the exploiter.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) - According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1998), internally displaced persons are “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised border”. The UN Refugee Agency explains: “Even if they have fled for similar reasons as refugees (armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight.”

International protection – the mutual system of protection offered to those fleeing persecution. It is international in scope, because all 145 countries that have ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention (see below) have agreed to offer protection to human beings escaping persecution from whatever part of the world, should this ever be necessary.

Leave to remain – a person who is accepted as a refugee in the UK is usually given five years’ leave to remain, during which time they can access welfare benefits and services, and seek employment. After five years, they can apply for indefinite leave to remain (permanent settlement).

Migrant – The United Nations defines a migrant worker as “a person who is to be engaged, is engaged, or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national”. The OECD defines a long-term migrant as “a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.” It is generally recognised that migration occurs for a variety of reasons, including employment, education and family reunification, with many people making a positive decision to build a new life in a new country, and others feeling compelled to do so for a variety of reasons, including poverty, climate change, displacement and other severe hardships.

Refugee – the legal definition of a refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (Article 1, 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees). Put simply, a refugee is a person who has been granted refuge, or protection, from persecution in a country that is not the one in which they were born. Refugees move to escape persecution and they have no protection from their own state (often it is their own government that threatens to persecute them).

Refugee Convention – the 1951 Refugee Convention is the primary international agreement governing the protection of people fleeing persecution. Denmark was the first country to ratify the Convention in 1952 and since, it has been ratified by 145 states. One of the main rules in the Convention is that people should never be returned to their country “where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (Article 33). Such action would intrinsically breach the principles and requirements of the treaty. One of the principles included in the 1951 Refugee Convention is that governments should take “necessary measures” to protect the families of refugees and give priority to “The protection of refugees who are minors, in particular unaccompanied children and girls, with special reference to guardianship and adoption”.

Smuggled – being taken illegally into a country. The smuggler will have obtained financial or other material benefit by their actions.

UK Visas and Immigration – the part of the UK Home Office that deals with immigration, asylum and nationality applications. Formerly called UK Border Agency.

Unaccompanied child – a child who arrives into the UK without any parent or guardian; also known as a separated child (see ‘Separated child’).

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Contact us

Karen Thomas
Ethnic Minority Achievement Manager/Lead Adviser
Portsmouth Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)

Floor 1, Core 6
Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
PO1 2AL

023 9273 3130

karen.thomas.emas@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Tina Henley
Headteacher
Portsmouth Virtual School

Portsmouth City Council
Floor 2, Core 6
Civic Offices
Portsmouth
PO1 2EA

023 9268 8076

tina.henley@portsmouthcc.gov.uk