Supporting newly arrived children and young people who need additional support to learn and thrive

Operational guidance for mid-year admissions, assessment, placement planning and interim education

Summary

This guidance sets out Reading's coordinated pathway for newly arrived children and young people entering through mid-year admissions withoeut an education, health and care plan (EHCP), where complex needs may affect access to mainstream education.

Reading School Admissions team refers eligible cases for a one-off Reading Family Hub information-gathering meeting, with interpretation or translation where required, before the priority placement panel agrees either mainstream admission with support or progression of an education, health and care needs assessment alongside specialist placement planning.

Where a child remains unplaced, the Education Access and Support team arranges suitable interim education, subject to provider quotations and panel approval, until an EHCP is issued and responsibility transfers to the SEND team.

Owners
School Admissions and RISE Service Lead

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Contents

Summary 1
1. Purpose and principles 3
2. Scope 4
3. Operational pathway 4
4. Decision-making framework 6
4.1 Mainstream admission with support 6
4.2 Education, Health and Care needs assessment and specialist placement planning 7
Support for the family with the EHC needs assessment request 7
Specialist waiting list and placement planning 8
Support while the child remains unplaced 8
5. Interim education and commissioning 9
6. Process flow 11
Appendix 1: School Admissions form 12
Appendix 2: School visit summary and concerns form 14
Appendix 3: Email to parent or carer—invitation to a Family Hub meeting 15
Appendix 4: Family Hub information-gathering template 17

1. Purpose and principles

The purpose of this guidance is to establish a timely, fair and evidence-led response when a child or young person without an Education, Health and Care Plan moves into Reading and presents with complex educational needs that may be above the level a mainstream school can ordinarily meet without substantial additional support.

The process is intended to prevent children from moving repeatedly between School Admissions and schools without a coordinated assessment or decision. It also provides a route through which immediate education, longer-term placement planning and statutory SEND action can be considered together.

The following principles apply:

- The child or young person's right to suitable education remains central throughout the process.
- Families must be treated as partners in assessment and planning.
- The child or young person's views must be obtained in a form appropriate to their age, development and communication needs.
- A school's concern is a trigger for coordinated assessment, not evidence by itself that mainstream education is unsuitable.
- Mainstream education with proportionate support must be considered before concluding that a specialist pathway is required.
- A lack of available specialist places must not result in a child receiving no education.
- Interim education must be individually designed, regularly reviewed and linked to a clear longer-term plan.
- Alternative provision must not be used as a default substitute for specialist education where specialist education is required.
- Decisions must be recorded with clear evidence, rationale, actions, responsible officers and review dates.
- Interpretation and translation must be provided where required so that language is not a barrier to participation or informed decision-making.

The priority placement panel provides Reading's multi-disciplinary route for agreeing one of two pathways: mainstream admission with appropriate support, or progression of an education, health and care needs assessment with interim education and specialist placement planning where required.

2. Scope

This pathway applies only where:

- a child or young person has recently moved into Reading from another local authority area or from abroad
- an application is being managed through mid-year admissions
- information from the family, previous setting, previous local authority, professionals or a Reading school indicates a potentially high or complex level of need
- a school visit or initial admissions discussion raises substantial concern about whether the child could access the proposed mainstream placement safely and meaningfully; and
- the child or young person does not have an education, health and care plan, and an urgent, coordinated process is required before a sustainable education plan can be confirmed.

This pathway must not be used for a child or young person who already has an education, health and care plan.

Where an education, health and care plan already exists, the case must be managed through the SEND team's transfer, review, consultation and placement-planning processes rather than this pathway. For children without an education, health and care plan, consideration of an education, health and care needs assessment should run alongside education and placement planning where the available evidence suggests that provision beyond that ordinarily available may be required.

3. Operational pathway

Stage 1: Mid-year admissions application

The child or young person enters the usual mid-year admissions process. School Admissions confirms that the child does not have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and gathers the available information.

Stage 2: School visit or initial consideration

The family visits or discusses the proposed school. The school considers the available information and whether the child could access the school with ordinarily available provision, reasonable adjustments and identifiable additional support.

If the school believes the child's needs may be above the level it can typically meet, it must complete the school visit summary and concerns form in *Appendix 2* and submit it to School Admissions. The school must not simply state that it cannot meet needs.

Stage 3: Referral to the Family Hub assessment meeting

School Admissions refers the family to an assessment meeting at an appropriate Reading Family Hub. Reading's Family Hub offer operates across four hubs and supports families through childhood and the teenage years, including young adults with SEND up to age 25. The four locations are East and North, Ranikhet, Southcote and South Reading.

The appointment is coordinated with Reading Borough Council's autism adviser, and/or the SEND consultant in the RISE service. The practitioner allocation should reflect availability and the child's presenting needs.

An interpreter, translator or accessible-format service must be commissioned where the family or young person requires one. Staff should follow the Reading intranet page *Interpretation and Translation* (can be provided by the Family Hub business admin support). The Big Word is the council's sole provider for remote, face-to-face and telephone interpretation, document translation and alternative formats.

Remote interpretation through Microsoft Teams should be considered where appropriate. The team responsible must arrange and manage the booking through The Big Word platform. Family members, including children, should not normally be relied on to interpret sensitive or complex educational information.

Stage 4: Family Hub information-gathering meeting

This is a one-off, practitioner-led meeting with the family and, where possible, the child or young person. It is not a diagnostic or specialist assessment. Its purpose is to clarify the presenting concerns, understand the family's experience, review the information already available and identify the questions that the priority placement panel needs to consider.

The meeting should provide a concise summary of:

- the child or young person's strengths, interests and views
- the family's main concerns, priorities and placement views
- previous education and support, based on available records and family information;
- the main barriers likely to affect access to education
- communication, language, health, safety or safeguarding information that needs immediate attention
- support or adjustments that may help a mainstream placement to be explored
- whether further professional assessment or advice is required
- what interim education the child or young person may be able to access.

The practitioner should use professional judgement and the available information to identify the most significant barriers. The meeting is not expected to test every area of need or determine a final placement.

The meeting may include:

- a conversation with the child or young person and parent or carer
- a brief observation of communication, interaction and engagement
- review of available plans, reports and school information
- contact with School Admissions, the previous school or another professional where essential information is missing.

School Admissions will record the initial application and referral information using *Appendix 1*. The school's concise account should be recorded using *Appendix 2*. School Admissions should use the parent or carer email template in *Appendix 3* to explain the next step and invite the family to book a Family Hub meeting. The practitioner should record the output from the Family Hub meeting using *Appendix 4*.

Stage 5: Referral to priority placement panel

The completed Family Hub information summary and available supporting evidence are sent to the priority placement panel.

The referral pack should include all available information. The panel should make a collective, evidence-led recommendation and record the rationale, actions, responsible officers and review date.

4. Decision-making framework

For a child or young person without an education, health and care plan, the priority placement panel should agree one of two routes. We aim to get the case discussed at priority placement panel within two weeks following the meeting.

The outcome of the meeting will be provided to admissions by the business support administrator.

4.1 Mainstream admission with support

Where the evidence indicates that mainstream education is suitable, School Admissions continues to identify and secure a mainstream placement.

The support plan may include:

- Inclusion funding
- Experts at Hand support
- RISE involvement
- Educational Psychology assessment, advice and provision planning
- Specialist-teacher advice
- Speech and language therapy or occupational therapy advice

- a planned transition programme
- staff training
- environmental or sensory adjustments
- communication support
- a time-limited enhanced staffing arrangement
- a reduced or phased start only where lawful, necessary and time limited
- an early review date.

The panel decision must identify the support required, who will arrange it, the intended impact and when it will be reviewed.

4.2 Education, health and care needs assessment and specialist placement planning

Where the evidence indicates that a child without an education, health and care plan may require provision beyond that ordinarily available in mainstream education, the panel should agree that an Education, Health and Care needs assessment request is progressed. The child is likely to remain unplaced while statutory assessment and specialist placement planning continue, and this must be acknowledged by priority placement panel.

The child must not be left without education while assessment and placement planning are underway. The interim package should begin as quickly as possible and be based on what the child can safely and meaningfully access.

Support for the family with the EHC needs assessment request

The parent or carer will be supported to contact Reading Information, Advice and Support Service (Reading IASS), which provides free, impartial information, advice and practical support with the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process.

This can include helping the family understand the request, express their views, organise evidence and complete the relevant paperwork. Because IASS is a self-referral service, the parent or carer will normally need to make the initial contact, with practical help to do so where required.

Some families may need practical help to prepare and submit the request. This may include:

- explaining the purpose and stages of the EHC needs assessment
- helping the parent or carer understand what information is required
- helping the family record the child or young person’s views, strengths, needs and aspirations

- helping the family gather and organise relevant reports, previous school information and other evidence
- supporting the parent or carer to complete and submit the request
- arranging interpretation, translation or accessible information where required
- confirming that the request has been received and explaining what will happen next.

Reading IASS can provide the hands-on support described above. Where IASS is unavailable, the family cannot readily engage with a self-referral service, or another arrangement is agreed as more appropriate, the Education Access and Support team or another agreed professional must provide or coordinate equivalent practical help.

Specialist waiting list and placement planning

When sufficient evidence is available, the priority placement panel may agree that the child is suitable for a specialist pathway. The child should then be placed on the appropriate waiting list for:

- Additional resource provision
- Specialist unit provision
- special-school provision
- another specialist pathway consistent with Reading's continuum of provision.

Agreement of specialist suitability does not by itself identify or name the final setting. The SEND team must progress statutory consultation and placement planning through the relevant process. The child should be added to the appropriate live waiting list and the decision recorded on Synergy.

The priority placement panel guidance states that the panel identifies the appropriate type of pathway, while exact placement and funding decisions are progressed separately through statutory consultation and resource decision-making.

Support while the child remains unplaced

Where a child remains unplaced, the priority placement panel must decide what type of alternative provision is likely to be suitable. This decision will inform the offer made to the family.

The panel should provide a broad view of the type of interim provision that may be suitable, including whether the child is likely to require tuition, alternative provision or a combination of both; whether delivery should generally be face-to-face, online or blended; the main learning, communication, sensory, health, safety or engagement considerations; and any indication of the child's current capacity to access education. The panel is not

expected to specify a detailed timetable, provider, venue or package. The Education Access and Support team will use this overview to develop the proposed package.

5. Interim education and commissioning

The Education Access and Support team is responsible for arranging and coordinating the interim package while the child does not have an education, health and care plan. Once an education, health and care plan is issued, responsibility transfers to the SEND team.

Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 requires the local authority to arrange suitable education, at school or otherwise, for a child of compulsory school age who, because of illness, exclusion or another reason, would not otherwise receive it. This duty is particularly relevant where the available evidence indicates that the child is likely to require a specialist setting but no suitable placement is yet available.

The authority must consider the child's actual circumstances and arrange an interim package that is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and special educational needs; identifying a future specialist placement or adding the child to a waiting list does not discharge the duty.

Although section 19 provision should normally be full-time, "full-time" is not a fixed number of hours and a child with complex needs may not initially be able to access a conventional school timetable. A part-time or phased package may therefore be lawful where it provides the education that is currently suitable and reasonably practicable for that individual child, rather than being used because provision is unavailable or unaffordable.

The package should begin without avoidable delay, combine tuition, specialist or therapeutic input and engagement activity where appropriate, record why the proposed hours and delivery arrangements are suitable, and include frequent review with a clear intention to increase education as the child's capacity develops. The absence of an education, health and care plan, assessment activity, procurement requirements or uncertainty about the final specialist setting must not leave the child without suitable education.

When the priority placement panel recommends tuition, the Education Access and Support team will develop a package that reflects the panel's expectations about hours, delivery method, venue, curriculum, outcomes and required adjustments.

- Tuition may be face-to-face, online or blended
- It may be combined with suitable alternative provision, engagement activity or specialist input
- The level of tuition must be reasonable in light of the child's needs, current ability to engage, and entitlement to education. Any initial limitation in hours must be justified, reviewed and increased where the child can access more

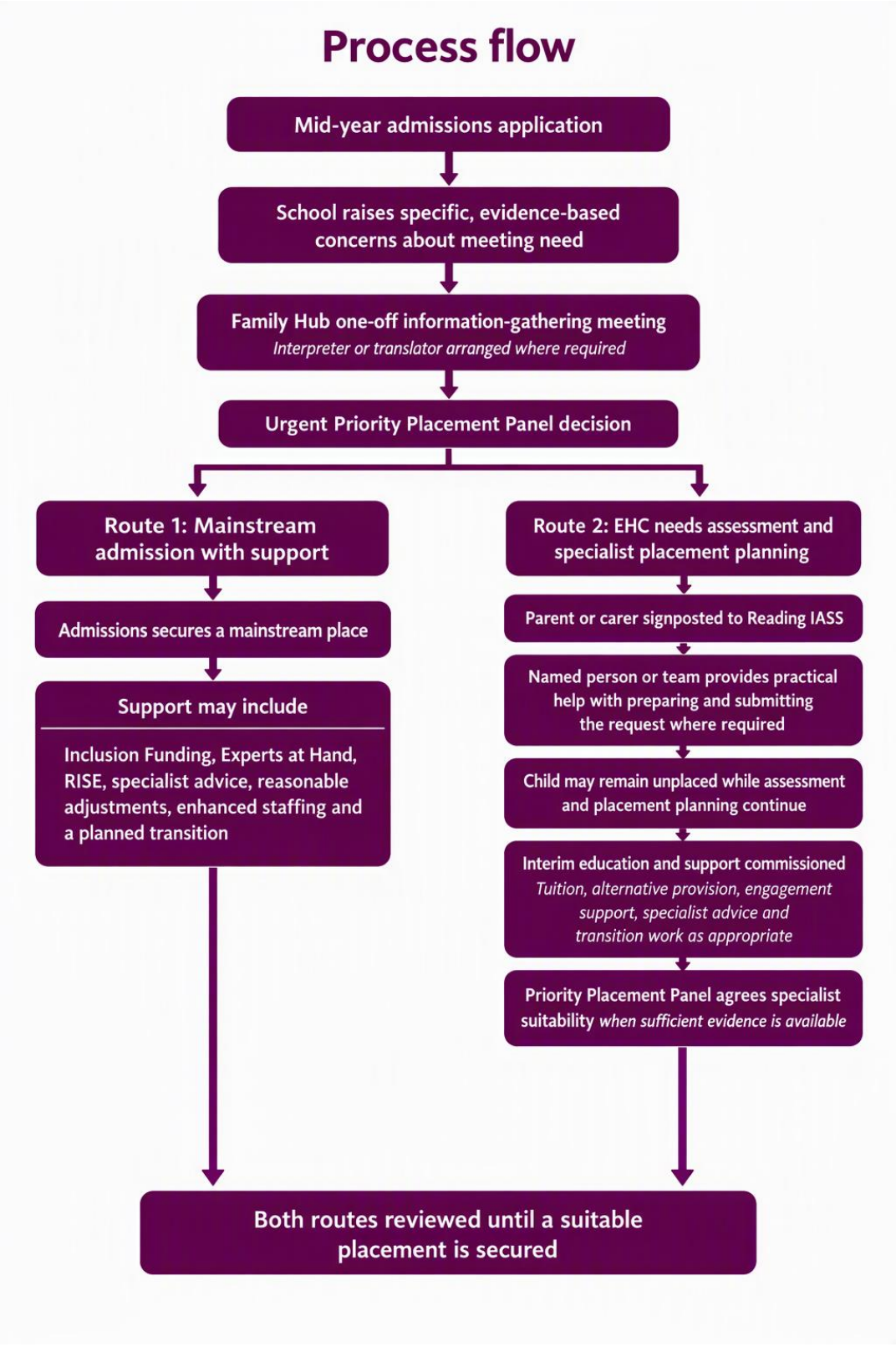
- The package must identify the provider, timetable, venue, curriculum, intended outcomes, safeguarding arrangements and review date.

The Education Access and Support team must obtain three written quotations from tuition providers. The preferred package must reflect suitability, quality, safeguarding, capacity to start and value for money, rather than cost alone.

- The proposed tuition package and preferred provider must be submitted to the Thursday ISP panel for approval.
- Provision must not be commissioned until the required approval has been obtained, unless an authorised urgent arrangement applies.
- The Education Access and Support team remains responsible for implementing and reviewing the approved package until an education, health and care plan is issued.

If three suitable quotations cannot be obtained, the reason must be recorded and presented to the panel as part of the approval request.

6. Process flow



Appendix 1: School Admissions form

Child Details	
Name	
Sex	
Date of birth	
Age	
Year group	
Core student ID	
Case management student ID	
Address	
Is child known to social care?	
Send needs known	
What documents have been provided	

School Admissions Information/Update	
Date application received	
Reason for application	
Date arrived in Reading	
Previous location	
CME date	
Previous school	
Catchment school	

	Name	Outcome	Date allocated	Straight line distance
Pref 1				
Pref 2				
Pref 3				
Pref 4				

Additional information	
School information from email sent to Admissions	

Appendix 2: School visit summary and concerns form

To be completed by the SENCO or another appropriate school representative following the child or young person's visit or initial discussion. Keep responses brief and distinguish direct observations from information provided by the family or records. This form records concerns for further consideration; it does not by itself determine that the school cannot meet need.

Child or young person	Name: Date of birth:
School visit	School: Date of visit or discussion:
Form completed by	Name and role: Date completed:
Child's strengths	Briefly summarise strengths, interests, positive engagement and anything that appeared to help.
Needs observed or identified	Summarise the main learning, communication, interaction, sensory, emotional, physical, health or personal-care needs observed during the visit or identified from available information.
Diagnosis and professional information	Record any known diagnosis, relevant professional involvement or reports, and state the source of the information. Write "none known" where applicable.
Key concerns about meeting need	Explain briefly why the school is concerned that it may not be able to meet the child's needs safely and meaningfully. Link concerns to specific observations or evidence, the school environment and the provision or adjustments that would be required. Do not give a general statement that the school cannot meet need.

Appendix 3: Email to parent or carer - invitation to a Reading Family Hub meeting

Subject: Next steps in finding the right school for your child

Dear [parent or carer's name],

Following your recent visit to [school name], the school has asked for further input from the local authority before the next steps are agreed. This does not mean that a decision has already been made about which type of school your child needs. It means that we need to gather some additional information so that we can understand your child's strengths, needs and circumstances and make a properly informed decision. We remain committed to finding the right school for your child as quickly as possible.

We would like to invite you and your child to a meeting at one of Reading's Best Start in Life Family Hubs. You will meet a practitioner from our specialist family outreach service. They will listen to your views, gather more information about your child and help us represent and advocate for your child when the local authority considers the most appropriate education arrangements.

The meeting is intended to help us understand:

- your child's strengths, interests and what is important to them
- their previous experience of education
- any learning, communication, sensory, emotional, physical, health or personal-care needs
- what helps your child feel safe, communicate, engage and learn
- your concerns, priorities and views about their education
- any reports or professional information that may help us plan appropriately.

The meeting is not a diagnostic assessment and does not determine the final school placement. The information gathered will help the local authority consider the support and type of education that may be most appropriate for your child.

Please bring any information or evidence you already have to the meeting, where possible. This might include previous school records, assessment reports, professional letters, support plans or relevant health information. These documents will help us understand your child's needs and avoid asking you to repeat information that has already been recorded.

While your child is not on roll at a school, we will also share their details with Reading Borough Council's Children Missing Education (CME) team. A member of the CME team may contact you from time to time to undertake welfare checks and keep in touch while we

work to secure an appropriate school place for your child. They will be available to offer support and discuss any changes in your child's circumstances during this period.

Please use the relevant option below:

Primary-age children - approximately ages 4 to 11

Book an appointment with the Autism Advisor:
https://outlook.office.com/book/FamilyHubsSENDNeurodivergentAdvisorySupport@reading.gov.uk/?ismsaljsauthenabled

Secondary-age young people - approximately ages 11 to 16, or up to 19 where they remain in school education

Book an appointment with the SEND Consultant:
https://outlook.office.com/book/FamilyHubsSENDNeurodivergentAdvisorySupport@reading.gov.uk/?ismsaljsauthenabled

If you need an interpreter, translation, an accessible format or another adjustment for the meeting, please tell us when you book.

Once the meeting has taken place, the information gathered will be considered alongside the information from School Admissions and the school. We will continue to progress the case as quickly as possible and will keep you informed about the next steps.

Kind regards,

School Admissions team

Appendix 4: Family Hub information-gathering template

This template is for a newly arrived child or young person who does not have an Education, Health and Care Plan. It supports a one-off meeting with the family and, where possible, the child or young person. It is not a diagnostic or specialist assessment. Complete only the sections that are relevant and distinguish clearly between existing evidence, information reported by the family and the practitioner's direct observations.

A. Meeting and contact details	
Child or young person's name	
Date of birth	
Parent or carer name and contact details	
Date and location of meeting	
Practitioner completing template	Autism Advisor / SEND Consultant / Other:
People present	
Interpreter, translation or communication support	Required: Yes / No Language or communication method: Arrangements made:
School that was visited	School considered or visited:

B. Child or young person and family views	
Prompt	**Summary**
What is important to the child or young person?	
Strengths, interests and things they enjoy	
What helps them feel safe, communicate, engage or learn?	
What do they find difficult or avoid?	
Family's priorities and views about placement	

C. Information and reports	
Question to ask	**Response**
What types of schools or education settings has the child attended previously? And why have they moved	
Has the child received support from any education, health, social-care or other professionals?	
Does the child have any diagnoses, health needs, medication or personal-care needs that are important when considering education?	
Are there any reports, letters, plans or other documents that could help when considering a placement?	

D. Your child's development and experience of learning	
Area	**What the parent or carer tells us**
Communication and language How does your child communicate and understand what other people say?	
Friends and other people What is your child like when interacting with other children and adults?	
Learning How is your child progressing with reading, writing, maths and other learning?	
Attention and organisation How well can your child focus, complete tasks and move between activities?	
Feelings and behaviour How does your child show their feelings, and what helps them feel calm and safe?	
Sensory needs and the environment How does your child respond to noise, light, touch, smells or busy places?	
Physical, medical and personal-care needs What help does your child need with	

movement, health, medication or personal care?	
Independence and changes What can your child do independently, and how do they cope with changes or new settings?	
Anything else Is there anything else that may affect your child's education or the support they need?	

Practitioner summary for Priority Placement Panel – to be completed after the meeting	
Area	**Brief practitioner summary**
Overall picture from the meeting	
Child or young person's main strengths	
Parent or carer's main concerns and priorities	
Main factors affecting access to education	
What may help the child access education	
Recommended route for panel consideration	Mainstream admission with support / EHC needs assessment and specialist placement planning / Further information required Brief reasons:
If the child remains unplaced, broad view of suitable interim provision	
Further information or action required	
Completed by and date	