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To: local authorities and admission authorities

The admission into school of children previously in care outside of England

Children in care are amongst the most vulnerable in our society. We know that the vast majority of children taken into local authority care have experienced abuse or neglect and therefore require additional support. Wherever possible, they should be admitted to the school which is best able to meet their needs. School admission authorities have been required to give looked after children¹ highest priority in their admission arrangements since 2007.

In February 2012, this priority was extended to previously looked after children – children who have been looked after but ceased to be so because they were adopted or became subject to a child arrangements order or special guardianship order. Our intention was to ensure that all children who receive highest priority whilst in care of the local authority continue to receive that priority once they have left care.

We have now also decided that when the opportunity arises, we intend to make further changes to the School Admissions Code to ensure that children who were previously in care outside of England also receive highest priority for admission into a school in England. We are doing this because these children are also vulnerable and may have experienced abuse and neglect prior to being placed in care. We therefore feel it is right that these children should be on an equal footing for the purposes of admission to school as those children looked after and previously looked after by a local authority in England.

Any changes to the School Admissions Code will be subject to consultation and the will of Parliament. However, until we are able to change the Code to require admission authorities to give such children highest priority for

¹ A 'looked after child' is a child who is (a) in the care of a local authority in England, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in England in the exercise of their social services functions.

admission into school, I would like to encourage admission authorities, when setting school admission arrangements, to use their discretion and give these children second highest admissions priority in their oversubscription criteria.

I understand that many admission authorities may have already started to consult on making changes to their admission arrangements for the 2019/20 intake and many may not need to consult at all. If that is the case, I would like to encourage admission authorities to introduce this change for the following school year.

Yours sincerely

Nail Gill