

## **Alternative Provision Strategy: national context and background information**

The government have commissioned a number of different reports and reviews pertaining to alternative provision in recent years. An overview of the information obtained from these government documents has been referred to within this report alongside a review into the arrangements for children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs in Lancashire commissioned in 2018/19.

A summary of the arrangements for alternative provision in local authorities with low exclusion rates and an overview of the approach adopted by Lancashire's statistical neighbours is also provided in this background information.

Persistent disruptive behaviour is the main reason for schools' referrals of pupils to alternative provision, although the amount of time a school invests in trying to manage an individual pupil's behaviour would seem to vary and also to reflect the nature of the behaviour being presented<sup>1</sup>. This large scale investigative study found that schools tend to source and plan support for pupils at risk of exclusion internally and often had recourse to external support from the local authority or other professional groups. For the main part this support was viewed favourably although concerns were raised about budgetary constraints and the timeliness of the support that was offered on occasions.

This study also found that school staff were concerned about the level of disengagement of the individual learner, the impact on other pupils and overall performance of the school. These factors are in addition to those relating to funding identified in a report into alternative provision completed by the Isos Partnership and which was commissioned by the Government in October 2018. In this report it was suggested there was a possibility that schools might be incentivised to permanently exclude children and young people at the expense of fixed-term exclusion. The reason cited being that local authorities fund placements for permanently excluded pupils whereas schools fund those for fixed-term exclusions<sup>2</sup>.

During an independent Lancashire review of children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs completed in 2019 a number of headteachers indicated there was a significant disincentive to be inclusive and although some schools reported spending considerable sums on alternative provision, others expressed the view that spending more than the funding attached to an individual pupil was unsustainable.

Research carried out by Isos Partnership in 2018 revealed that children were more likely to be placed in alternative provision following a permanent exclusion as they got older, whereas younger children in key stage two and to a lesser extent in key stage three were more likely to attend alternative provision for preventative reasons. Similarly, pupils at a later stage of their education, were less likely to have dual

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<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/748910/Investigative\\_research\\_into\\_alternative\\_provision.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748910/Investigative_research_into_alternative_provision.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/748910/Investigative\\_research\\_into\\_alternative\\_provision.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748910/Investigative_research_into_alternative_provision.pdf)

placements split across their mainstream school and alternative provision, although both types of provider recognised the benefits of dual registration arrangements and how it supported reintegration back into mainstream education<sup>3</sup>. Older pupils were less likely to return to mainstream education, particularly towards the latter stages of key stage four, which in part seem to be associated with the engagement of mainstream schools in the reintegration of pupils, particularly where these had been permanently excluded previously.

This research also indicated that transition from alternative provision into post-16 provision was problematic for a number of reasons not least because there is no universal reporting system, which makes it difficult to monitor the outcomes for these young people.

Headteachers expressed their view that a substantial proportion of pupils who left alternative provision lack the necessary resilience to cope with life in a post-16 mainstream environment. In addition it was considered by some that transitional support tended to focus on the initial stage of the process and that some learners would benefit from longer term tailored support. Some providers have attempted to address this through the development of transition co-ordinator roles who provide support for the first six months in a new placement.

A literature review of alternative provision commissioned by the government in 2017 also highlighted the importance of developing clear transition pathways and transitional support for pupils as they move out of alternative provision<sup>4</sup>. It was suggested that transition should be supported through the development of strong links between alternative provision providers and local colleges and providers and the provision of high quality targeted careers advice.

Research conducted by the Isos Partnership completed in October 2018 suggested there was no definitive model for organising alternative provision but that reliance upon one provider or sector, including the maintained sector may be problematic<sup>5</sup>. The researchers who completed the literature review into alternative provision found that most young people, especially those with complex needs, require an individualised package of support involving more than one provider.

Over 50% of local authorities operated different systems for alternative provision and specialist provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and generally outcomes in these authorities tended to be slightly better. The Isos Partnership concluded the multiple interdependencies between the two different types of provision provided evidence of the need to see alternative provision as part of a system of broader inclusion support that required careful strategic planning. This was seen to be more beneficial than the development of more formalised approaches

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<sup>4</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/585550/Alternative\\_provision\\_effective\\_practice\\_and\\_post-16\\_transition.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/585550/Alternative_provision_effective_practice_and_post-16_transition.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/752548/Alternative\\_Provision\\_Market\\_Analysis.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752548/Alternative_Provision_Market_Analysis.pdf)

setting out which pupils should be supported in alternative provision and which would be more likely to benefit from specialist social, emotional and mental health provision.

At the time of Isos Partnership publication 76% of local authorities had centralised arrangements where responsibility for funding, local provision and decision making remained with the local authority. 24% of local authorities had devolved some or all of the responsibilities for funding, provision and placements to schools either individually or through local partnership arrangements. Pupil outcomes in terms of exclusion rates and financial outcomes tended to be better when some or all of the responsibilities were devolved to schools.<sup>t</sup>

The findings of the Isos Partnership did not indicate there was a correct model for arranging decision-making responsibilities with respect to alternative provision. It was more that the devolvement of decision making responsibilities to schools is one way of fostering collective responsibility for alternative provision and that the de-delegation of funding was a way of promoting this.

The Isos Partnership research found that local authorities were instrumental in maintaining a system-level overview and framework that supported individual and collective responsibility for pupils likely to benefit from alternative provision. Local authorities were seen as having a key role to play in overseeing the management of pupils not in full-time education, providing advice, brokering solutions and supporting the reintegration of pupils back into mainstream education.

Investigation into the approaches adopted by the local authorities that are the statistical neighbours of Lancashire and where permanent exclusion rates are low presents a similar picture. A range of different approaches have been adopted that include:

- alternative provision management committees, comprising local secondary schools,
- agreed sets of principles including that for example that pupils in key stage four remaining the responsibility of their original school and that schools within a local area will support reintegration for pupils who have had one permanent exclusion;
- the development of an alternative provision and targeted programmes for pupils during year 11 and beyond, that promotes partnership working between families, schools and businesses;
- the employment or commissioning of careers coaches and/or transition support workers over extended time periods;
- the development of a flexible purchasing system for alternative provision;
- the provision of a quality assurance framework for alternative provision;
- de-delegation of funding to schools in one local authority

A number of concerns were raised with respect to the actual delivery of alternative curriculum itself. In the investigative research providers of alternative provision for example cited difficulties in balancing a vocational curriculum with core academic

subjects and managing the range of different types of needs presented by pupils that had been referred. This was an issue that was also highlighted in the literature review in that pupils are sometimes offered a somewhat utilitarian curriculum that serves to reinforce their marginalisation. Similarly families expressed some concerns about the breadth of the curriculum offer and how this might affect future prospects to engage in further and higher education, although many offered endorsement for the increased opportunities to gain vocational work based experience.

Another concern raised by the providers of alternative provision related to difficulties in the recruitment of a suitable workforce. This was reinforced by the finding of the literature review which stated that alternative provision requires a wide range of specialist staff that are well trained, caring and knowledgeable, but that there were limited opportunities for staff working in different alternative provision settings to share experience and expertise. In addition concerns were raised about the sufficiency of advanced training in special educational needs in England.

There would appear to a view more generally that relatively few alternative provision programmes had been evaluated with any rigour<sup>6</sup> and that schools are not able to provide evidence based evaluations of the effectiveness of approaches to intervention that had been implemented.

2017-18 financial year the average cost of a full time placement in alternative provision for one academic year was £18,000. Placements within the maintained sector were £17,600, slightly more in an academy and £20,400 when alternative provision was provided by an independent provider. The Isos Partnership found there was considerable variation in terms of cost across the local areas but were unable to identify key factors that provided any sort of explanatory value.

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<sup>6</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/585550/Alternative\\_provision\\_effective\\_practice\\_and\\_post-16\\_transition.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/585550/Alternative_provision_effective_practice_and_post-16_transition.pdf)