



Department  
for Education

# Investigative research into alternative provision

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# Contents

Glossary	6
Executive Summary	9
Chapter 1: Introduction	15
Policy background and context	15
Aims and objectives of this research	17
Summary of the methodology	20
Structure of this report	22
Chapter 2: Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)	24
Methodology	24
Scoping and screening	24
Coding and appraising	25
Synthesising	26
Strength of evidence	26
Question 1: What are schools doing to help pupils at risk of exclusion?	27
Strategies focused on the student	29
Strategies focused on the school	33
Question 2: Why are pupils referred to Alternative Provision?	37
Question 3: How do schools use Alternative Provision?	38
Question 4: What does quality look like in Alternative Provision?	39
Question 5: What are the processes of exclusion and referral to AP?	41
Question 6: How are students reintegrated into mainstream?	43
Gaps in the evidence	46
Chapter 3: Identifying and supporting pupils at risk of exclusion	50
Chapter summary	50
Identifying pupils at risk of exclusion	51
Assessing the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction	54
Supporting pupils at risk of exclusion to remain in school	56
Sources of support	56
Varying assessment and support approaches for specific groups of pupils	57

Key prevention strategies	58
Schools' use of evidence for the effectiveness of support	63
Off-site direction	64
Managed moves	64
Accessing LA provision and support	65
Chapter 4: Referrals to alternative provision	67
Chapter summary	67
The use of Alternative Provision	68
When is Alternative Provision considered?	68
Is AP used proactively or as a last resort?	70
Reasons for not having recently referred anyone to AP	71
Reasons for recent referrals to AP	72
The referrals process	73
Who is involved?	73
AP commissioning and referral arrangements	74
Schools' involvement in quality assurance	80
Information received at referral	81
Assessments carried out on referral	84
Provision of information to support effective reintegration	85
Ensuring a smooth transition	86
A positive relationship with the LA and mainstream schools	86
A 360-degree induction process	87
A 'soft landing'	88
Keeping the mainstream school involved	89
Parents' experiences of referral processes	89
The pupil perspective on referral to AP	93
Chapter 5: Delivering alternative provision	95
Chapter summary	95
The nature of provision	96
The curriculum in AP	97
Alignment with the national curriculum	98

Balancing core subjects with individual student needs and interests	100
Funding	100
Qualifications offered	101
Decisions about what qualifications to offer in AP	101
GCSEs	103
Perceived gaps in or issues with the range of qualifications available	104
Teaching and learning approaches	105
Evidence for the success of teaching and learning approaches	108
Monitoring student progress	109
Sharing progress with mainstream schools	112
Sharing progress with parents	113
The pupil perspective on AP	115
AP staffing	115
Staff training and development	117
Staff recruitment and retention	118
Chapter 6: Reintegration into mainstream education	120
Chapter summary	120
The extent of reintegration	121
Reasons for not reintegrating	122
Deciding to reintegrate pupils into mainstream school	126
Factors influencing the decision	126
Finding a suitable mainstream school placement	127
The reintegration process	129
Processes used to support reintegration	129
Processes that work well	130
Main challenges for effective reintegration	134
Chapter 7: Post-16 outcomes	136
Chapter summary	136
The extent that APs track pupil outcomes once they have left	137
How pupils are tracked	137
How careers support is delivered	139

The nature of the careers support provided	141
Support provided to help achieve post-16 outcomes	143
Work experience placements	145
Building links with local employers	147
Pupil experience of careers advice in AP	148
Parents' views on careers advice and post-16 destinations	149
Post-16 destinations	150
Typical destinations	150
Supporting pupils post-16	151
Sustaining post-16 outcomes	152
Chapter 8: Conclusions	156
Bibliography	160
Appendix: Detailed methodology	183
Overview of the methodology	183
Telephone depth interviews with schools and APs	183
Case studies	187

## Glossary

- **Alternative provision (AP):** alternative provision is education for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed-term exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.
- **AP academy:** PRUs that convert to academy status become AP academies. PRUs can convert on their own, as part of a chain of academies, or with the support of a sponsor.
- **AP free school:** As of 1 July 2018 there are 41 AP free schools that have been opened through the free schools programme, with more planned. AP free schools can be established with support from a local authority or from a proposer group. When deciding whether to approve new AP free schools, the DfE takes into account applications that will fit within local authorities' strategies for children and young people requiring alternative provision.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS):** CAMHS is the term used to describe all services that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing. CAMHS support might be from the statutory, voluntary or school-based sector, such as an NHS trust, local authority, school or charitable organisation. It covers a range of conditions such as depression, problems with food, self-harm, abuse, violence or anger, schizophrenia and anxiety.
- **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP):** An Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN support, e.g. their needs are more complex and the graduated response used in schools does not meet their needs. EHC plans have replaced statements of special educational needs.
- **Exclusions:** These can be **permanent** (the guidance states that 'permanent exclusion should only be used as a last resort, in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school') or **fixed-term** exclusions (which can be for a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year, and where schools have a strategy for reintegrating the pupil back into the school at the end of the exclusion period).
- **Independent alternative provision:** This term is used in the main body of the report to denote any alternative provision that is not a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU),

AP academy or AP free school, or a designated hospital school or other medical AP. It includes a range of different types of providers such as charities, private companies, and voluntary and community sector organisations. Independent AP may be commissioned by mainstream schools, other (state) alternative providers or local authorities, and they may or may not be registered with the DfE and subject to inspection by Ofsted. The statutory guidance on this states an AP provider should be registered as an independent school if it meets registration criteria (i.e. that it provides full-time education to five or more full-time pupils of compulsory school age, or one such pupil who is looked-after or has a statement of SEN).

- **Independent schools:** Independent schools are private schools which charge fees to attend instead of being funded by the government. Pupils do not have to follow the national curriculum. All such schools must be registered with the government and are inspected regularly, either by Ofsted, the Independent Schools Inspectorate, or the School Inspection Service.
- **Off-site direction:** Schools can direct pupils off-site into AP for the purpose of improving their behaviour and/or engagement in education. In this respect it can be a preventative measure, as a way to avoid the need to exclude a pupil in the longer-term. It might be, for example, AP at a vocational provider for one day a week alongside attending their mainstream school 4 days a week, or it might be full time.
- **Managed moves:** where pupils are moved between schools with the agreement of everyone involved including both schools and the child's parents. This may be to another school in the same group of schools (e.g. a multi academy trust), or schools which have an agreement to participate in managed move 'exchanges'. It can be used as an intervention to reduce the risk of a child being permanently excluded.
- **Pupil Referral Unit (PRU):** an establishment run by a local authority which is specifically organised to provide education for children who would not otherwise receive it. This can be, for example, because they are excluded or have a mental or physical health condition that means they cannot attend their normal school.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND):** A child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:
  - has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or

- has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.

SEN are generally thought of in the following four broad areas of need and support:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
- Sensory and/or physical needs.

Mainstream schools and maintained nursery schools must have a designated Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), a member of staff responsible for co-ordinating the provision for pupils with special educational needs.

- **Special schools:** A special school is a school specifically organised to make special educational provision for pupils with SEN. Generally only children and young people with an Education, Health and Care plan can be admitted to a special school. Special schools cater for children whose needs cannot be met within a mainstream setting, and/or whose parents or carers have agreed to or requested a special school placement.

## Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from a large-scale investigative research study exploring the landscape of alternative provision (AP). Alternative provision is education for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed-term exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.

The overarching aims of this study were to build the evidence based on current practice in AP, and consider whether, how and with what effect schools and AP settings take pupil characteristics into account throughout the process, from early identification of pupils at risk of being referred to AP, through to reintegrating pupils into mainstream provision. The key research objectives were to understand how schools support children at risk of exclusion; how schools use alternative provision; and how AP providers support children placed in their settings. The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned IFF Research to conduct this research, in partnership with Professor Patricia Thomson (University of Nottingham) and Professor Martin Mills (University College London).

The research is qualitative and based on a rapid evidence assessment (REA), telephone depth interviews with 276 schools and 200 alternative providers in England, complemented by 25 in-depth case studies with alternative providers across a range of settings and regions. Case studies included interviews with AP headteachers, other staff, parents and pupils. All fieldwork was conducted between February and June 2018.

### Identifying and supporting pupils at risk of exclusion

The primary and secondary mainstream schools that took part in the research commonly took active steps to identify pupils perceived to be at risk of exclusion or off-site direction and intervened early to prevent this if possible. Schools used a range of monitoring tools, but behaviour logging systems (computer-based systems which allow schools to systematically record and analyse breaches in behaviour policy) appeared to work well *in combination with* other approaches, such as input from pastoral staff and taking into account the pupil's background and characteristics when deciding on how best to respond. Schools recognised using this type of holistic approach as being of particular importance when dealing with pupils who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), especially Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and autism.

Schools tended to source and plan support for pupils at risk of exclusion internally. Schools often had recourse to external support from their LA and other professional services, and found this to be generally positive, but there were issues with availability, timeliness and budget constraints. The main preventative strategies that schools put in place included mentoring, temporary withdrawal (either to internal inclusion units or short-

term/ part-time AP), bringing in specialist external support or assessment services, and changes to individual timetabling.

There was a lack of 'hard evidence' of schools evaluating the impacts of specific preventative strategies. Schools could cite avoiding an exclusion as evidence of success but as the schools did not carry out formal evaluations, they were unable to determine if it was their preventative strategies that led to this outcome.

## **Referrals into AP**

The amount of time that schools spent managing pupil behaviour before referring them to AP varied hugely according to the pupil and the nature of the behaviour itself (for example, a severe one-off incident could lead to a quicker referral to AP). The main reason why schools used AP was in response to pupils who exhibited persistent disruptive behaviour. From the schools' perspective, the use of AP in these circumstances was underpinned by concerns about pupil disengagement from learning, and – more broadly – the impact of this on other pupils, and ultimately on school performance. This was a strong theme underlying the views of secondary schools in particular. AP providers often highlighted that poor behaviour could be a sign of SEND, including SEMH or autism, which is possibly unidentified at the point of referral.

AP providers considered that referrals worked best where full information about the circumstances of the referral were disclosed upfront; where they were able to get comprehensive information on the pupil's background and prior attainment; where any SEND were already identified, or identified early in the transition; where there was a gradual or phased introduction to the AP setting; and where the pupil's parents/ carers and mainstream school remained closely involved. Overall, AP providers reported that referrals worked best where schools referred children directly to their settings, typically for short-term placements. Referrals for permanent exclusions usually came through the LA. Where this was the case, AP providers received limited information about children's needs or backgrounds and there was no opportunity for a gradual induction process.

When required, AP providers pushed schools for fuller information about pupils who were referred directly or excluded from school. Some of them insisted that the pupil remain on the school roll, where possible, to instil a greater sense of dual responsibility. However, this was not possible in the cases of permanent exclusion. Schools and APs judged that these dual registration arrangements, and providing detailed information on the pupil's behaviour, wellbeing and academic progress in AP, could assist in the process of reintegrating them back into mainstream education.

The split between the referrals process for permanent exclusions and short-term placements was also problematic for APs in terms of funding. There was a strong view among some AP providers that schools were incentivised to permanently exclude

children at the expense of fixed-term exclusions because local authorities funded placements for permanently excluded pupils, whereas schools funded those for fixed-term exclusions. AP providers described this as short sighted, as permanent exclusion would cost the LA more in the longer term and they deemed short-term placements to be highly effective in reducing permanent exclusions (although this was based on perception rather than hard evidence).

Parents and pupils in AP reported strong feelings of anxiety and stigma, prior to starting in AP, particularly in cases of permanent exclusion. Parents felt they lacked information and support throughout the process of moving into AP, and were particularly critical about lack of communication from the mainstream school. Many parents felt that the school could have done more to keep the pupil in mainstream education, and at the time of referral most of the parents interviewed would have preferred this. In cases of permanent exclusion, parents also voiced concern about the lack of information on what this might mean for their child in terms of post-16 pathways and longer term implications. Parents and pupils tended to appreciate the opportunity to have taster visits, induction meetings, and even a phased transition into AP and found that their experience of AP was much more positive than they had initially feared.

It was common among schools that had not used alternative provision to say they had consistent approaches in place to manage behaviour, which had prevented the need for them to make any referrals. The strategies these schools cited to help them to manage behaviour effectively including: offering alternative curricula, modelling positive behaviour, reward programmes, de-escalation techniques, mentoring and pupil code of conduct agreements.

## **Delivering AP**

Despite anxiety prior to starting AP, once children were settled into their placements, parents usually felt their child benefited from the smaller class sizes, fresh start, and more personalised support. AP is a hugely diverse sector offering varying types of placement, to pupils who come for a wide range of different reasons, spanning exclusion through to referral because of an AP's ability to manage complex SEND including SEMH and autism. Pupils starting at AP have varying attainment levels and this creates particular challenges for AP providers in terms of the range and nature of the provision they offer. AP providers commonly reported offering GCSE Mathematics and English alongside other qualifications such as Functional Skills, arts-based provision, vocational subjects and qualifications, and a narrow range of additional GCSE subjects. AP providers reported it was challenging to get the balance between core academic subjects and vocational subjects right for such a wide range of pupils with different backgrounds, abilities and reasons for being in AP. AP providers offering short-term or part-time placements favoured shorter, unit-based qualifications which could be completed in a couple of weeks, as they felt strongly that this helped pupils to gain self-confidence and

demonstrate that they could achieve a qualification. There was a mix of approaches in terms of how closely APs seek to mirror mainstream curricula, but generally this was regarded as important to support effective reintegration (particularly among younger pupils) and positive post-16 destinations (among older ones).

AP providers most commonly employed general approaches such as smaller class sizes, and personalised or one-to-one tuition, rather than pedagogical approaches designed specifically for a particular pupil group (such as SEND, students suffering from mental health conditions, and/or students with a history of violent behaviour). Small class size was considered as fundamental to effective teaching in AP and was appreciated by pupils. Pupils interviewed in the case studies frequently preferred the alternative provider they attended compared to their mainstream school, especially if they had been referred for SEMH reasons.

Pupil progress was closely monitored in AP, and regularly reported to parents, sometimes via daily updates. Monitoring encompassed attendance, behaviour and attainment, as well as emotional wellbeing and softer outcomes. Parents interviewed in the case study research appreciated the frequent updates they received on their children's progress and welcomed the emphasis on more 'positive' communication than they were used to from schools.

AP providers reported that teacher recruitment was a more pressing concern for them than retention, with more of them experiencing recruitment difficulties than difficulties retaining staff, once appointed. The issue was not a lack of applicants but rather the challenge of finding someone suitable for the job.

### **Reintegration to mainstream education**

Around nine in ten AP providers expected at least some of their full-time pupils to return to mainstream schools or colleges, and around half aimed to reintegrate all or most of them. Where reintegration was not a planned outcome, this was typically because it was seen as too disruptive to reintegrate the pupil once they were in Year 11, pupils had SEND and needed more specialist provision, or were seen as unable to cope with mainstream education. In other cases, pupils or parents/carers did not want a return to mainstream education, preferring the smaller class sizes and more individualised support in the AP.

The decision on whether reintegration was appropriate for a pupil was usually discussed between the AP provider and the referring or new school, and in some cases parents/carers, educational psychologists and the LA would be involved. Factors influencing the decision on reintegration to mainstream education included the child's behaviour (especially if exclusion was behind the initial referral to AP), academic progress, attendance, and pupil or parent/carer preference.

There were mixed views from AP on the ease of finding suitable placements in mainstream provision. AP providers reported some mainstream schools being reluctant to take pupils from AP (typically because of concerns about their behaviour, feeling that they would not be able meet the child's needs, and/or concerns about their likely academic performance). Difficulty finding mainstream schools willing or able to take on pupils from AP was a particular challenge for pupils that had been permanently excluded, and in rural areas with fewer local mainstream schools.

Schools and AP providers shared common views of the processes required to facilitate a smooth reintegration for the pupil. These included good communication between the AP, the school, the pupil and the parent/carer, setting clear academic and behavioural targets for the pupil, phased (part-time) reintegration, and additional support and mentoring for (and monitoring of) the pupil. AP providers were often keen to remain involved in supporting the pupil after they returned to mainstream school and felt this could play a key part in successful reintegration, but some struggled to resource this. Schools used data on behaviour, attendance and attainment, together with feedback from staff and sometimes parents/ pupils, to gauge the effectiveness of reintegration overall, but they did not tend to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions to support reintegration.

### **Post-16 destinations**

Most AP providers tracked post-16 destinations. This was especially true for large, full-time AP providers with high proportions of pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. AP providers who were inspected by Ofsted – including state and independent providers who meet DfE's registration criteria - were also more likely to track pupils' post-16 destinations. However, there were a number of challenges in tracking pupil destinations, with most AP providers reliant on keeping in personal contact with ex-pupils, to stay updated on their activities once they had left. AP providers commonly raised the issue that whilst tracking information was available, the data tended to miss specific groups of young people.

APs considered that the lack of a universal reporting system made it challenging to support effective transitions to post-16 destinations. APs often reported that despite voluntarily offering extended support to pupils who leave their settings, many such pupils still struggle to participate in education, training and employment compared to their peers. This reinforces the need highlighted in the REA and in previous DfE research for more longitudinal data/ research among pupils who leave AP, to identify and address their on going support needs, and evaluate what works in supporting positive, sustained transitions into post-16 education and training.

While post-16 destinations data was important, it was also critical that any positive outcomes could be sustained. Even if they successfully started college or work-based training, ex-pupils tended to face many external pressures. Linked to this, some teachers

felt that a substantial proportion of pupils who left AP still lacked the necessary resilience to cope with mainstream life, for example due to on going mental health issues. Some headteachers also pointed out that post-16 support provided for leavers was focused on the initial transition process i.e. the summer holiday period and the start of the first term afterwards. Once that support ended, these headteachers felt that many pupils began to struggle as they did not receive the same level of tailored support in their new setting. AP providers were attempting to address this to an extent, via roles such as transition co-ordinators who offered more long-term support into the first six months or so, but it is important to note that this was often done on a voluntary basis, or was subsidised by the provider themselves, as they did not receive funding to support pupils once they had left at 16.

Pupils and parents interviewed in the case studies were favourable about the nature and extent of careers advice and support they had received, in particular the opportunity to do work experience placements. However, related to the narrower GCSE curriculum available in most APs, there was a high level of concern among some parents and pupils in the case studies about what they perceived as the narrowing chances of being able to progress to A-levels and then to university. The most likely routes for pupils transitioning out of APs post-16 were FE colleges or apprenticeships/ work-based training, with a minority planning to go back into mainstream sixth forms to do A-levels.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This report presents the findings from a large-scale investigative research study exploring current processes in alternative provision (AP). IFF Research conducted this study between January and June 2018, in partnership with Professor Patricia Thomson (University of Nottingham) and Professor Martin Mills (University College London). The research was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE).

### Policy background and context

Alternative provision is defined as education outside school, arranged by local authorities or schools, for pupils up to age 18 who do not attend mainstream school for reasons such as school exclusion, behaviour issues, school refusal, or short- or long-term illness. AP is provided through full or part-time, and short or longer-term placements. Local authorities (LAs) are responsible for arranging suitable education for permanently excluded pupils, and for other pupils who – because of illness or other reasons – would not receive suitable education without such arrangements being made. Governing bodies of schools are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education from the sixth day of a fixed-term exclusion. Schools may also direct pupils off-site for education if this is to help improve their behaviour.

AP includes a variety of settings such as pupil referral units (PRUs), AP free schools and academies, and independent providers. As of January 2017, there were 234 PRUs, 79 AP academies (56 converters and 23 sponsored) and 39 open AP free schools in England. Some pupils who are already in alternative provision may also attend other forms of alternative provision off-site.

Around half (25,821) of pupils in AP are educated in state place funded settings. This includes pupils who are sole or dual main registrations, pupils in AP academies and free schools, boarding pupils and pupils registered in other providers and further education colleges. It also includes 10,152 dual subsidiary registered pupils. The other half of pupils (22,212) are educated in 'other' AP settings and 'Other LA AP settings'<sup>1</sup> which includes, for example, independent AP providers and pupils being educated in virtual schools.

Evidence from a range of sources suggests that Key Stage 4 pupils leaving AP at 16 do considerably worse than their peers in mainstream school in terms of educational attainment and post-16 transitions. Almost half (47%) of children in AP are aged 15 to 16 (Year 11). Comparatively few achieve the equivalent of five GCSE passes: indeed, national data shows that just 4.5% of children who attended AP achieved Grades 9-4 passes in English and Mathematics at GCSE, compared to 65% in state-funded mainstream schools. Pupils who leave AP at the end of compulsory school age are considerably more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment or training). In 2015/16, only 57 per cent of pupils from alternative provision went to a sustained

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<sup>1</sup> DfE (January 2017), Schools, pupils and their characteristics  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2017>

education, training or employment destination after Key Stage 4, compared with 94 per cent from state-funded mainstream schools. This figure is unchanged from 2014/15<sup>2</sup>.

Data shows that the majority of the pupils in AP are boys from disadvantaged backgrounds. Over 70% of children in PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools are boys, compared to 51% in state-funded primary and secondary schools. More than 40% of children in PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools are eligible for free school meals (FSM), compared to 14% in mainstream state-funded schools. A large proportion of children in AP come from white British backgrounds. Children from black Caribbean; mixed white and black Caribbean; mixed white and black African; gypsy/ Roma; Irish; and Irish traveller backgrounds are all over-represented in AP, compared with the mainstream state-funded school population<sup>3</sup>.

A high proportion of children in AP academies, AP free schools and PRUs have identified special educational needs compared to those in mainstream schools: 79% of children have a SEN or disability, and 11.2% have SEN statements or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. This compares to 14.6% and 2.9% in all schools respectively. Many of these pupils have a social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) need, which has broader implications for their behaviour and the resources required to support them.

AP has been under increasing pressure in recent years, mainly due to rising school exclusions combined with financial pressures faced by alternative education providers and schools alike. A recent Ofsted report (2016)<sup>4</sup> found that, although there had been improvements since its earlier report in 2011, and the subsequent Taylor Review<sup>5</sup>, schools still needed to do more to ensure the quality of education and safeguarding in AP.

In March 2018, the DfE announced that the independent review of school exclusions was to be led by Edward Timpson CBE. The review will explore how headteachers use exclusion in practice, and why some groups of pupils are more likely to be excluded than others.

The DfE is also committed to reforming AP to deliver better outcomes for pupils, and a more efficient system. Also in March 2018, *Creating Opportunity for All* set out the government's vision for reforming AP, developing and sharing best practice within and

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<sup>2</sup> DfE (October 2017), Destinations of key stage 4 and key stage 5 students, England, 2015/16  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-ks4-and-ks5-pupils-2016>

<sup>3</sup> DfE (January 2017), *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Ofsted (2016) Alternative provision. London: Ofsted. The findings from Ofsted's three-year survey of schools' use of off-site alternative provision. Available at:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/500918/Alternative\\_provision\\_findings\\_from\\_Ofsteds\\_threeyear\\_survey\\_of\\_schools\\_use\\_of\\_off-site\\_alternative\\_provision.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500918/Alternative_provision_findings_from_Ofsteds_threeyear_survey_of_schools_use_of_off-site_alternative_provision.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, C. (2012) Improving alternative provision. London: Department for Education. Available at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-alternative-provision>.

beyond the sector, and strengthening partnership arrangements for commissioning and delivering AP. In the same month, the DfE launched a £4 million AP Innovation Fund to develop projects that will deliver better outcomes for children in AP and extend evidence-based projects to new settings. The Fund aims to support projects which address one or more of the following objectives:

- Supporting children to make good academic progress in AP and successful transitions from AP to education, training and employment at age 16 and beyond;
- Supporting children to reintegrate into suitable mainstream or special school placements, where this is in their best interests and compatible with the interests of other children at that school; and
- Enabling better educational outcomes for children in AP by increasing parental or carer engagement.

## **Aims and objectives of this research**

Pupils' experiences of the alternative provision sector, including their outcomes, lacks a solid evidence base: it is a complicated and diverse system that makes generalisations from research difficult<sup>6</sup>. This investigative study was commissioned in order to address that gap, through the provision of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) and new, primary research among schools and AP providers. It sits alongside a complementary research study exploring the AP market, focusing on local authority (LA) and provider views of AP market supply, AP market demand, the effectiveness of the existing market, and the efficiency with which it operates<sup>7</sup>.

The overarching aims of this study were to build the evidence base on current practice in AP, and consider whether, how and with what effect schools and AP settings take pupil characteristics into account throughout the process, from early identification through to reintegration. The key research objectives were to understand how schools support children at risk of exclusion; how schools use alternative provision; and how AP providers support children placed in their settings. The research is composed of two strands:

- Strand 1 focuses on schools' relationship to the AP sector, including their policies on off-site direction and exclusions
- Strand 2 focuses on the AP sector itself to look at practices, provision and pupil prospects.

The specific research questions for each strand are set out in the table 1.1 on the next page.

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<sup>6</sup> Highlighted in Sue Tate Consulting Ltd (2017) Alternative provision: effective practice and post-16 transition, Department for Education.

<sup>7</sup> Add reference to ISOS report once available

**Table 1.1: Research questions: schools and Aps**

Strand 1 (Schools)	Strand 2 (APs)
<p><b>Supporting pupils at risk of exclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do schools assess and plan for the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion?</li> <li>• What school policies and protocols on the use of AP are in place?</li> <li>• What are schools doing to help pupils at risk of exclusion and/or off-site direction (especially pupils who are more likely to be excluded, e.g. SEND, Black Caribbean and GRT backgrounds, disadvantaged and CiN pupils) to remain in mainstream/special education?</li> <li>• Does the LA work with schools to offer specific provision to help pupils at risk of exclusion remain in mainstream?</li> <li>• How effective do schools consider different interventions to be?</li> <li>• What evidence, if any, is available regarding successful strategies to avoid exclusion?</li> <li>• What evidence, if any, is available regarding the success of AP placements?</li> </ul> <p><b>Routes into and out of AP and rationale for use</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do schools view and use AP?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rationale for AP</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the reasons that pupils are in AP?</li> <li>• What are the benefits and drawbacks of AP?</li> </ul> <p><b>AP practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do AP settings assess and plan for the needs of pupils – both on entry and throughout their placement? How is progress assessed throughout their time in AP?</li> <li>• What provision do pupils receive, including academic, pastoral and multidisciplinary support?</li> <li>• How is a support package developed?</li> <li>• What approaches and practices (e.g. pedagogical, pastoral) are used in AP?</li> <li>• What evidence is there of their effectiveness?</li> <li>• To what extent are qualified teachers (QTS) and non-QTS staff used?</li> <li>• Are pupils offered careers advice? If so, who usually provides it?</li> <li>• Is the AP offer designed to be a short-term option to address a specific issue, or for a long-term need?</li> <li>• Do pupils generally stay for the length of time expected?</li> <li>• What methods are in place for monitoring pupil progress?</li> </ul>

Strand 1 (Schools)	Strand 2 (APs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this differ to how they see special provision? Does it differ for different groups?</li> <li>• What are the main reasons for referral to AP?</li> <li>• What is the rationale behind the decision to refer?</li> <li>• Is it viewed as a short-term option to address a specific issue or as a long-term replacement for school?</li> <li>• By what routes can pupils be referred?</li> <li>• How do schools decide which AP pupils go to? E.g. do they tend to use the local PRU or commission in a child centred way?</li> </ul> <p><b>Mechanisms in place to support pupil transitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What school and local authority level processes are in use prior to, and following, the decision to direct pupils off-site and/or exclude pupils?</li> </ul> <p><b>Reintegration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do pupils reintegrate back into mainstream?</li> <li>• What processes are in place to support this?</li> <li>• What evidence of success, if any, is available? Do schools (or LAs) continue to monitor the progress of pupils once in AP?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are pupils' outcomes tracked after leaving AP, if so how? Who is any information shared with? What are their most common destinations?</li> <li>• What processes are in place for returning pupils to mainstream schools?</li> <li>• What processes are in place to aid post-16 transitions, or aid post college destinations for those in AP at an FE college?</li> </ul> <p><b>AP workforce</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the workforce characteristics and strategies?</li> </ul> <p><b>AP system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are staff, pupil and parent/carer perceptions of the AP system and its processes? How could it be improved?</li> <li>• What outcomes are providers looking to achieve?</li> </ul>

## Summary of the methodology

The methodology comprised of four main components. More detail on each of the following components can be found in the Annex to this report.

- A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA);
- Telephone interviews (276) with Headteachers or other senior leaders in mainstream primary and secondary schools (Strand 1);
- Telephone interviews (200) with Headteachers or their equivalents in AP (Strand 2); and
- Case studies among 25 AP settings, which included face-to-face discussions with Headteachers, staff and pupils (usually one-to-one, though some pupils and some staff were interviewed in pairs or in small groups), and a mixture of face-to-face and telephone depth interviews with parents. The case studies were purposively selected to provide a broad range of different types of AP, covering different phases of education, and across all regions of England.

The telephone interviews used a semi-structured approach, with a mixture of closed and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions included prompts and probes to elicit more in-depth information than would have been available in a survey. Telephone interviews were undertaken using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) as this provides automated monitoring of the sample by different characteristics and logs the outcome of each phone call (refusal, respondent busy, interview booked, etc.), offering greater efficiency when there is a large sample. All open-ended responses were entered in full. The telephone interviews lasted around 50-55 minutes on average, although the interview length for schools varied considerably depending on whether or not they had made use of AP. Case study interviews with AP staff lasted around 45 minutes to one hour each: pupil and parent interviews were shorter, generally around 20-30 minutes. The research team developed user-friendly information sheets and consent forms for parents and pupils in order to gain informed consent. Data coding and analysis used an Excel-based framework approach.

The sample of schools and APs was drawn from the government's Get Information About Schools (GIAS) service, with the AP sample supplemented by manual searching for independent AP providers via the internet and publicly-available LA directories. A breakdown of the achieved interviews and case studies is shown in the tables below.

**Table 1.2: Achieved school telephone interviews**

School Stage	Mainstream School	Special School	Total number of interviews
Primary	80	3	83
Secondary	143	10	153
All-through	20	20	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>276</b>

**Table 1.3: Achieved AP telephone interviews**

Alternative Provision Type	Total number of interviews
Independent AP	73
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	65
AP Academy	25
FE colleges	21
AP Free School	15
Designated Hospital School	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>

**Table 1.4: AP case studies**

Alternative Provision Type	Total number of settings
Independent AP	8
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	8
AP Academy	3
FE College	3
AP Free School	2
Designated Hospital School	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

The AP case studies included interviews with 227 individuals across a range of primary, secondary and all-through (primary and secondary) settings. A breakdown of these interviews is shown in the table below.

**Table 1.5: Composition of the case study interviews**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>PRU</b>	<b>Academy</b>	<b>FE College</b>	<b>Hospital School</b>	<b>Free School</b>	<b>Total</b>
Pupils	31	19	9	12	8	8	<b>87</b>
Teachers	14	18	7	10	3	4	<b>56</b>
Parents	13	14	13	4	4	3	<b>51</b>
Senior Leaders	12	9	5	2	3	2	<b>33</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>227</b>

It should be noted that the research is qualitative in nature, and the sample structures were designed to provide sufficient breadth and depth of interview coverage by institution type, phase and region, rather than to provide a representative distribution. It is particularly notable that the schools sample over-represents secondary phase provision compared to the national school profile, but is reflective of the fact that the vast majority of AP referrals are made at secondary level. To avoid any misinterpretation of the findings as being statistically representative, they are not reported in precise percentages, but we have used broad fractions (such as ‘around half’) or terms like ‘majority’ to indicate prevalence within the sample, given the relatively large number of qualitative interviews involved.

## Structure of this report

The remainder of this report sets out detailed findings from the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), followed by an exploration of the findings from the investigative research:

- Chapter 2 presents the REA, exploring key findings and highlighting the remaining evidence gaps, some of which are addressed in this report;
- Chapter 3 discusses the strategies that mainstream schools employ to support pupils at risk of exclusion and in other situations that might lead to an AP referral, including access to support from local authorities;
- Chapter 4 focuses on the referrals process itself, from the perspective of schools, AP providers, parents / carers and pupils themselves;
- Chapter 5 examines AP delivery, including the nature and range of provision, approaches to teaching and learning, and the curricula and qualifications on offer. It also explores AP staffing issues;

- Chapter 6 explores approaches to reintegrating pupils into mainstream education, discussing perceptions of what works well and where the challenges lie, from the perspectives of schools and APs; and
- Chapter 7 shifts the focus to moving on from AP, into post-16 transitions, exploring what careers advice and support is available in AP, and how effectively post-16 destinations are tracked and sustained.

The concluding section draws together the key findings from the research to identify implications for policy and practice.

## Chapter 2: Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)

In order to provide context for the research, a rapid assessment of the existing evidence base was carried out. The purpose was to establish the volume and quality of research evidence on:

- School interventions designed to help prevent exclusions and/or prevent students moving long-term to alternative provision;
- How schools use exclusion and the extent, nature and impact of effective practice.

The REA also sought to identify any gaps in the evidence base.

This chapter reports the results of the REA. It begins by outlining what is meant by strength of evidence and then describes the rationale for selecting and evaluating literatures. The overall strength and quality of the literatures are detailed. The chapter then summarises the evidence related to six key questions:

- (1) What are schools doing to help pupils at risk of exclusion?
- (2) Why are pupils referred to Alternative Provision?
- (3) How do schools use Alternative Provision?
- (4) What is quality in Alternative Provision?
- (5) What are the processes of exclusion and referral?
- (6) How are pupils reintegrated into the mainstream?

The chapter concludes with a discussion of gaps in the evidence and strategic opportunities for further research.

### Methodology

The REA adopted a structured process: scoping, screening, coding, appraising and synthesising, each of which is detailed below.

#### Scoping and screening

The search proceeded in two stages. The first stage used the Taylor and Francis, Wiley and Sage databases of journals. Scopus, Web of Science, Psycinfo, ERIC, EBSCO and Proquest were also used. University library searches were conducted for books. The first search was framed by location (UK only) and by date (2007-present). The search terms were: Alternative and education; Alternative and provision; Alternative and school\*; School\* and exclusion; School\* and offsite direction; School\* and inclusion; School\* and

suspension; School\* and referral; PRU and England; Hospital and school\*; Interagency and school\*; School\* and 'youth at risk'; School\* and NEET; 'Challenging behaviour' and school\*; 'School exclusion' and intervention; 'School exclusion and 'prevention'; Exclusion and 'out-of-school'; grey literature searches were conducted on Google with the above terms and 'report' and 'UK'.

Because of the lack of literature located, especially for some of the questions, the search was extended to a second stage, by using the following terms: School\* and disaffection; School\* and disengagement; School\* and multi-agency; 'In-school' and suspension/exclusion/referral; School\* and 'restorative justice'. Due to the shortage of systematic reviews, randomised control trials (RCTs) and cohort studies in the UK evidence base, the search was extended to international literatures over the same time period, using the same two sets of search terms and the same databases. This second search was restricted to European and English-speaking countries, due to their similarities with the UK education systems. No study that was in scope was excluded.

In the rest of this chapter, we identify where references relate to the international literature. All other literature relates to the UK context.

## Coding and appraising

The evidence was firstly coded according to the hierarchy of evidence strength (e.g. Greenhalgh, 1997):

- (1) systematic review and meta-analysis,
- (2) randomised control trial,
- (3) cohort studies,
- (4) case control studies, case series and case reports,
- (5) expert opinion.

However, this initial appraisal of items was mediated by the nature of the research questions and the potential for use in policy and practice decision-making. For questions (1) about preventing exclusion, and (6) about returning to the mainstream, an RCT was taken as the strongest evidence. For questions (2) – (5) mixed methods or case study research was considered particularly useful, depending on scale and sampling. Each item was examined for relevance to the specific research question, the utility of the research for answering the question, the appropriateness of its methods, the scale and scope of each study and the accurate execution and reliability of the methods (Gough, 2007; Pawson, 2006). Abstracts were read first but these were generally insufficient to provide the information required about methods and evidence. The two researchers read all of the items independently, and then brought their ratings together.

As the bulk of the research examined was qualitative, the review focused on the nature of the data and the meanings derived from it. Due to the importance of gauging the quality of interventions, in questions (1) and (6) the quality of evidence strength was specifically examined in relation to the hierarchy of evidence outlined above. These considerations helped to determine whether any particular study was considered significant, as well as valid and reliable. For other questions (Qs 2,3,4 & 5), significance was determined largely by the focus, scale and sample, as explained below. The evidence is assessed throughout. It is important to note that the much of the academic literature uses the term exclusion quite broadly: the term exclusion usually includes formal exclusion, illegal exclusion, offsite direction and children who cannot attend school. (Where the literature addresses a particular population that population is specified in the REA.)

Additionally, studies which came to similar conclusions were grouped together to establish patterns of evidence about particular aspects of each question. This allowed themes within the evidence to be mapped and gaps to be identified.

## **Synthesising**

The purpose of the REA was explanatory: it sought to “find sufficient studies to provide a meaningful configuration that has the potential to deepen the understanding of the phenomena” (Levinsson and Priotz, 2017, p. 213). The synthesis of coded literatures thus took a configurative approach, that is, explanation developed progressively as the material was read and analysed. Stages of reading and analysis overlapped and informed each other (Gough, Oliver and Thomas, 2012a).

The REA sought to find saturation levels for findings for each question, to determine where results were similar and congruent, as well as taking note of divergent findings (Gough, Oliver and Thomas, 2012b). As Gough et al. (2013, p. 20) suggest, “A spread of different and unusual cases may provide greater insights than a representative sample that reveals more about typical cases.”

This chapter reports selected studies in summary. Not all of the items scoped and read are explicitly cited. Appendix A (Bibliography) contains the full list of items collected for this review that met the inclusion criteria.

## **Strength of evidence**

The REA found a total of 182 items from the UK and 45 international items that were in scope for consideration. There were 8 systematic reviews, 7 randomised control trials, and 24 cohort studies. There were also 11 literature based papers and 11 expert opinion pieces based on no primary research. The remaining 166 items examined were predominantly case studies – 4 of which were case controls and 9 were ethnographies. Within these case studies there were variable foci and purposes, and hence size, scale

and method. All but two discussed their methods. Case studies were primarily directed to questions about in-school processes, exclusion and inclusion practices and reintegration. Whilst the REA found that the overall evidence base was patchy, the congruence of case study findings about school practices indicates that this evidence is useful for policy and practice decision-making.

The evidence related to each research question is discussed in the next sections, and the gaps are addressed at the end of this chapter. It is important to note that many studies took a generalist view of exclusion and alternative provision (AP). The evidence in such items was thus relevant to more than one of the REA questions and when numbers of studies are reported below, the same study may be reported more than once.

There were 143 items that addressed question one - what are schools doing to help pupils at risk of exclusion? There is more evidence about this area than any other. The remaining questions are not answered in any great depth in any of the different forms of literature, and were often answered in conjunction with question one. For question two there were 40 items; question three 28 items; question four 8 items; question five 42 items (with more detail in reports); and question six had 43 items.

## **Question 1: What are schools doing to help pupils at risk of exclusion?**

There is significant concern about school exclusions across the UK. This is evident by the different education authorities across the UK formulating a range of policy responses (Scottish Government, 2011, Welsh Government, 2012, Kilpatrick, McCarten, McKeown and Gallagher, 2007). Concerns have also been raised about the legality of some exclusions (Centre for Social Justice, 2011; Children's Commissioner, 2011; 2012; Butler, 2011; Ogg and Kaill, 2010) and about regional differences across the UK (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift, 2017). In the literature several key themes emerge.

Almost all of the literature reports that it is the most marginalised young people who experience exclusion (Riddell, 2009; Russell, 2016; Paget et al., 2017; Maguire, 2015). Paget, Parker Heron, Logan et al. (2017) analysed a large British birth cohort database (Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children - ALSPAC) to see population patterns in exclusion. Exclusion from school was associated with child, family and school-related factors identifiable at, or prior to, primary school age. Key characteristics were: male gender, lower socio-economic status, maternal psychopathology, mental health and behavioural difficulties, psychiatric disorder, social communication difficulties, language difficulties, antisocial activities, bullying/being bullied, lower parental engagement with education, low school engagement, poor relationship with teacher, low educational

attainment, and special educational needs. These demographic characteristics can be seen as predictors of risk.

Other key themes in the literature are:

- Those young people who are permanently excluded from school rarely ever return to mainstream schools (Searle, 2017; Gillies, 2016);
- School exclusion occurs in both primary and secondary schools (Maguire and Pratt-Adams, 2009);
- Exclusion can have long-term consequences for young people's life trajectories (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Pirrie et al., 2011; McNally and Telhaj, 2010); and
- Exclusions are always a disciplinary tool, but sometimes the process is also used as an opportunity to reflect on what needs to change for/with the pupil and the school (Pupil Inclusion Network Scotland, 2012).

Much of the literature on school exclusions relates to what schools are doing that fails to support those at risk of exclusion (see for example, Woods, 2008; Macrae, Maguire and Milbourne, 2003) rather than what they are doing that works. However, there is a growing body of work documenting a variety of preventative approaches in different schools (outlined below). These in-school prevention strategies can be divided into roughly two groups:

- Those that are focused on changing or supporting the pupil, and
- Those that are seeking to change what the school does to better meet the needs of those pupils in danger of being excluded, or to create an environment that minimises behaviour that bring about exclusions.

Whilst the majority of studies have a very specific intervention focus (see headings below), one study addressed interventions to change both the pupil and the school. Valdebenito et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of school-based interventions designed to reduce disciplinary exclusions that were implemented in mainstream schools with children aged four to 18. They considered 37 randomised controlled trials: 3 were from the UK; 33 studies from the US; and one was undetermined. They found four intervention types to be effective in the short-term. Three of these entailed a focus on the pupil (enhancement of academic skills, counselling, and mentoring/ monitoring) and one on the school (skills training for teachers). They concluded that school-based interventions did cause a small and significant drop in exclusion rates. However, this was on average in the first six months after intervention, with the effects not sustained. Valdebenito et al. point to the need for care in making conclusions about exclusion risk reduction due to the small number of studies involved.

## Strategies focused on the student

Schools generally offer a range of support to individual students experiencing difficulty at school and at home. This support often involves pastoral care teachers, school assistants and in some cases, counsellors (see Carey, Harris, Lee and Aluede, 2017 for an international overview of policy-related evidence about counselling). The processes of individual support are rarely researched for reasons of privacy and confidentiality. The literatures within scope in this REA thus reported research on school programmes and approaches. There were three dominant types: (1) family interventions, (2) withdrawal programmes, and (3) managed moves.

### Family interventions

The literature shows there are a range of strategies that focus on families (Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot 2007; Bagley and Hallam, 2016). These strategies principally have a welfare orientation which involves wraparound health and welfare support for families, and/or parenting classes (Pemberton, 2008). The literature on family interventions concludes that welfare-based approaches need to provide long-term solutions, not quick fixes. For example, a randomised control trial (Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot 2007) examining interagency support for primary pupils excluded from school, demonstrated that families need multidisciplinary support, and that intervening early is important, as is ensuring that families are fully engaged with the processes. Case studies come to a similar conclusion about the importance of working with families (e.g. Easton, Gee, Durbin and Teeman's 2011 study of multi-professional use of the Common Assessment Framework).

Such engagement with parents would seem to be necessary as interviews with parents of excluded pupils indicate that from schools written communications, they do not fully understand why their child has been excluded and that there is a need for better forms of communication between parents and schools (Parker, Paget, Ford and Gwernan-Jones, 2016). Case studies uniformly suggest that this communication is best served by the development of respectful and trusting relationships between schools and families (Mowat, 2015; Flitcroft and Kelly, 2016), especially when there are obvious class (Gazeley, 2012; Lupton and Thrupp, 2013) and ethnic (Sime, Fassetta and McClung, 2017; Ryder, 2017; Wright, Standen and Patel, 2009) differences between parents and those working in schools (see also Benjamin et al., 2003; Gazeley, 2010; Vincent, 2012). Some case studies (Leyland et al., 2016; Paget et al., 2017; Black-Hawkins, Florian, Rouse, 2007) demonstrate that schools benefit from hubs which facilitate interagency support for the diverse needs of young people in danger of exclusion, a point with which experts agree (New Philanthropy Capital, 2007).

There are also some family-focused and education oriented approaches including those that see parents and children working together (Hallam and Rogers, 2008, Pemberton,

2008). Case study evidence suggests that such strategies provide opportunities that benefit the education of both, for example, by parents enrolling in regular schools alongside their children or by parents being supported to become teaching assistants, homework helpers or literacy support workers (Orchard, 2007).

### **Withdrawal programmes**

Schools also employ a variety of programmes that withdraw pupils from some 'regular' activities to support their diverse needs. These programmes can take a personal development or educational orientation and include: nurture groups, confidence building programmes, gender specific programmes and behaviour programmes.

### **Nurture groups**

'Nurture groups' are one popular response to what are seen as the personal development needs of pupils in danger of being excluded (Colley, 2009; Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes, 2008; Binnie and Allen, 2008). Nurture groups are short-term interventions whereby children are withdrawn from class to engage in pro-social learning. The intention of these groups is to ensure that young people are emotionally prepared for learning and to support the development of their social skills. They are often seen as being important in the transition from primary to secondary school (Kourmoulaki, 2013). One cohort study (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007) indicated that schools with nurture groups appeared to work effectively with those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) needs. However, when the programme ended, the gains declined over time, showing that children needed more support in the mainstream setting to maintain their improved behaviour. Binnie and Allen (2008), who studied nurture groups in six Scottish schools, demonstrated that the presence of nurture groups in a school improves the school's overall ethos through improving relationships and supporting a culture of care. Furthermore, nurture groups provide opportunities for young people to access other services. An early infant school single case study (Doyle, 2003) indicates that mainstreaming nurture group principles can have positive effects on whole school ethos and inclusion. However, Hughes and Schlosser (2014) claim that the evidence base on nurture groups is not strong, and argue that there needs to be further research on the effectiveness of nurture groups, especially in secondary schools (Hughes and Schlosser, 2014). The REA supports this view, particularly as there are no longitudinal studies tracking children who have been in nurture groups.

### **Confidence building**

In some locations students are withdrawn for special sessions seeking to build their confidence or address personal behaviours such as anger management. In some instances, such short-term programmes have been deemed to be productive in terms of how pupils come to see themselves and their schools (Mowat, 2015; see also Nelson

and O'Donnell, 2012). For example, in Australia, a case study of a programme called Hands on Learning (O'Donovan, Berman and Wierenga, 2015) involved withdrawing students from class to participate in construction work. Evidence from this programme suggests that team work, combined with a curriculum that the students found meaningful, works to develop students' social skills. O'Donovan et al. (2015) argued, on the basis of their small scale study, that this was an approach that could be used in all schools. A US systematic review (Hamelin, Travis and Sturmey, 2013) demonstrated that anger management programmes which rely on 'talk' are not necessarily suitable for pupils with intellectual disabilities. There is also need for care to avoid stigmatising students by withdrawing them for 'special purposes' (Mowat, 2015; Sheffield and Morgan, 2017). Obsuth et al. (2016) conducted a randomised control trial of an hour long employability seminar offered to Year 9 and 10 pupils at risk of exclusion in 36 London secondary schools. They were sceptical about the effectiveness of 'bolt-on short-term' programmes, especially for those in greatest danger of being excluded. However, most short-term programmes are of longer duration usually lasting at least a school term, but the REA found no RCT evidence about such interventions. Case study evaluations of single programmes (e.g. Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014) often report that they are effective for some students; the REA found no comparative case studies of such programmes which would be useful in gauging relative effectiveness.

### **Gender specific programmes**

Boys are more likely to be excluded from school than girls (Ofsted, 2011). However, girls too experience exclusions (Sproston et al. 2017) and, historically, schools are often slow to recognise when girls are at risk (see Osler and Vincent, 2003; Lloyd 2005). There are some gender specific programmes offered to students at risk of exclusion: for example, programmes that specifically address some boys' problematic behaviours associated with particular forms of masculinity (Lines and Gallasch, 2009). There is some evidence that vocational programmes offered in alternative education can be highly gender-stereotypical, for example girls doing hair and beauty and boys doing mechanics (Thomson and Russell, 2007), and that some pedagogical approaches reinforce masculine behaviours and attitudes by creating 'boy-friendly' classrooms (Lingard, Martino and Mills, 2009).

### **Behaviour programmes**

A systematic literature review (Morrison Gutman and Schoon 2013) on interventions that address poor behaviour through, for example, Mentoring Programmes, Service Learning Programmes and Outdoor Adventure Programmes, argued that while such programmes could have short-term positive outcomes for participants, they had little impact on academic learning. They concluded that, 'There is no single non-cognitive skill that predicts long-term outcomes. Rather key skills are inter-related and need to be

developed in combination with each other'. (p.2) They also drew attention to the importance of pedagogy and school climate which we discuss below.

## **Prevention strategies**

The literature indicates that many schools employ a range of prevention strategies to avoid students being permanently excluded. These include part-time complementary alternative provision, school-based commissioning, on-site provision and managed moves.

### **Part-time complementary alternative provision**

Many schools draw on part-time complementary alternative provision to minimise exclusions (Pennacchia and Thomson, 2016). The type of approach utilised in alternative provision was key to the ways in which pupils were able to reintegrate into mainstream classrooms. Thomson and Pennacchia (2016) conducted seventeen case studies of alternative education sites across the UK. They argue that the most effective alternative provision involves joint planning between the mainstream and the alternative education provider and avoids a narrow focus on behaviour, instead opening up wider possibilities for the young people. As with more long-term forms of alternative provision, there is a need to ensure that the alternative provision addresses both social and academic outcomes (Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift, 2017; see also Shaw, 2017; Ofsted, 2016; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014; Martin and White, 2012).

### **Commissioning alternative provision**

The DfE conducted a trial of schools commissioning alternative provision. The trial was premised on the view that if schools retained responsibility for the young people at risk of exclusion or who had been excluded, the schools would be more careful in referring students to alternative provision and would ensure that the alternative provision that was offered was a 'good fit' for the student's needs. The evaluation of the commissioning trials confirmed this view (Institute of Education and National Foundation for Educational Research, 2013, 2014). Even though some of the alternative provision commissioned by the schools was off site and run by a mix of providers, there was a growth of onsite school-based provision. Schools were generally pleased to have more control over alternative provision and there was case-based evidence that students were more likely to remain in their home school at the completion of their period of exclusion.

### **Staying on-site for a fixed-term exclusion**

Some schools ensure that their pupils on fixed-term exclusions stay on-site. They establish a room or building, where students are removed from their peers, taken off timetable for some or all of their lessons, and are provided with specialist support. However, evidence on the effectiveness of on-site provision as an intervention to avoid

permanent exclusion is mixed. On-site provision is often offered to students at risk of permanent exclusion: they may have already experienced numerous fixed-term exclusions. A mixed methods case study of an 'inclusion room' in one secondary school (Gilmore, 2012) claimed that the intervention reduced permanent exclusions and enhanced attainment. On the other hand, a one-year ethnographic study of an onsite alternative provision (Gilles, 2016) demonstrated that there were ongoing differences in approach between 'mainstream and alternative' teachers and students, which at times led to conflict between teachers. Similarly, a case study of a seclusion unit in one London secondary school (Barker et al., 2010) suggests behavioural changes were short-term and short lived; students at risk of exclusion required substantive and ongoing support. The quality of such in-house provision also requires consideration (see rapid evidence review by Tate and Greatbatch, 2017, and discussion later in this chapter).

### **Managed moves**

It is common for schools to work with a 'managed move' process to prevent permanent exclusion from school (Abdelnoor, 2007; Parsons, 2009; Department for Education, 2013). In a systematic literature review of the managed move process as an alternative to exclusion, Messeter and Soni (2017) argued that for this approach to be successful there has to be effective communication between the schools involved, and with parents. Appropriate pastoral care support needs to be provided. A Flitcroft and Kelly case study of one local authority (2016) argues that it is critical that the new schools work on ensuring that pupils are able to develop a sense of belonging to their new location (see also the cluster case study conducted by Vincent et al., 2007); because attachment to the school is argued as a key to an inclusive school environment (Cooper 2008). Bagley and Hallam (2017) in a study of managed moves in one local authority argue that educational psychologists can play an important role in ensuring that transitions occur smoothly and that the pupils' needs are met in such moves.

### **Strategies focused on the school**

Some schools change the ways in which they operate to take account of their climate and ethos, curricula, pastoral care, transition support, structural change, teacher development and support for students with special educational needs (Lumby, 2013). We address these issues below.

#### **Climate and ethos**

Much of the literature on what schools can change to make their environments more supportive of pupils in danger of exclusion has demonstrated the importance of creating positive school climates where all students are respected (Pirrie, Macleod, Cullen and McCluskey, 2011). This has led to calls (Rogers, 2012; Ryan, 2009; Mackie and Tett, 2013; McCluskey, 2014; Estyn Report, 2012; Lumby, 2013) for greater student voice in

curriculum design, teaching methods, school policies and employment of staff (see Nind, Boorman and Clarke, 2012 for an example of student involvement in teacher employment). However, the literatures on student voice were not in the scope of the REA's questions 1-6.

Tied in with changes to school climate are attempts to deal with conflicts differently. One approach is grounded in notions of 'restorative justice' where perpetrator and victim are brought together in a managed conference (see for example case studies of successes with this approach by McCluskey, 2012). Case studies about strategies to reduce exclusion (Gazeley, Marrable, Brown and Boddy, 2013) stress the importance of positive relationships, whole school approaches to behaviour and recognition of inequalities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, good behaviour and high attainment, measured in school test and exam results, are aligned with an inclusive and positive school ethos (see multi-methods research by Gorard and Huat, 2011, which includes a survey of 3,000 secondary students). While outside the scope of this review, it is important to acknowledge school leadership as a key factor in creating a positive and inclusive climate in schools (McFarlane et al., 2013; Rogers, 2012).

## Curriculum

Some suggest that if pupils perceive curricula as irrelevant, disengagement and exclusions can occur (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014-5). Hence, curriculum innovations have been trialled as one way in which young people in danger of exclusion can be engaged – e.g. problem solving and social skills such as communication and conflict resolution (Nelson and O'Donnell, 2012), First Step (Princes Trust – 2011-13) and the Australian Hands-On approach referred to above (O'Donovan, Berman and Wierenga, 2015). Online programmes have also been advocated as a means of personalising curriculum and mentoring (Sefton-Green, 2013; Evans, 2007). However, there is very little literature detailing the effectiveness of different approaches to adapt the curriculum at a systemic level. Examples tend to be single case studies or evaluations of particular programmes.

It has been argued that the arts is one area that can facilitate making the curriculum more meaningful. Four US longitudinal studies, with baseline populations totalling 71,000 students, show that arts engagement led to statistically significant improvements in achievement for all pupils, but particularly for young people deemed 'at risk' of exclusion (Catteral, Dumais and Hampden, 2012). The researchers demonstrate that this engagement also led to improvements in employment outcomes and/or progression to further study.

There have also been some tensions noted in relation to schools' commitment to supporting pupils in danger of exclusion whilst at the same time trying to maximise the

school's record of academic achievement (Rayner, 2017; Alexiadou et al., 2016; Glazzard, 2011; Simmons, 2008). This has also been an issue of concern in the international literature (e.g. Slee, 2011).

### **Pastoral care**

Pastoral care involves an explicit allocation of time devoted to social and emotional needs. The literatures researching pastoral care were largely out of scope of the REA. However, some studies about lack of pastoral support were found in relation to students at risk of exclusion. Tucker's (2013) case study of 49 vulnerable pupils across the UK argued that pastoral programme resources are being directed away from those pupils who need it most by schools' learning targets. A case control study of 70 excluded and non-excluded children, their families and teachers (the SKIP study, Parker et al., 2016) demonstrated that young people are not accessing the support services that they need and that a full assessment of pupils' particular needs is important. This is particularly the case for pupils with special speech and language needs who often have behavioural difficulties (Law and Sivyer, 2003; Clegg et al., 2009). Nicola Rollock (2008) points out that in assessments for special education supports, it is important that race, class and gender issues are considered (see also Wright et al., 2009).

There has been an increasing use by schools of specialist care services for pupils and families (Harris, 2013). Solomon and Nashat (2010), for instance, explore the role of mental health professionals working in schools through a three year primary school case study. They show that these professionals are able to work with teachers in ways that make the young people's behaviours understandable, and then to work out strategies that have a systemic focus.

### **Transition support**

The transition between primary and secondary school is a key moment when students are at risk of exclusion (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011). However, practices in place to support pupil transition appear to be highly variable across schools (Gazeley et al., 2013). Sometimes, students whose primary schools managed to support them in ways that prevented exclusion, found the new larger secondary school too difficult. Sometimes students who had been excluded in primary school were further disrupted by their move to secondary. An older follow-up study of 726 primary students who were permanently excluded from their primary school (Parsons, Godfrey, Howlett et al., 2001) showed poor outcomes at secondary school with nearly half of the cohort experiencing further exclusions.

Some schools offer secondary school preparation summer programmes, developed to ease this transition from primary to secondary. However, the take up on these does not appear to have been widespread (Department for Education, 2013). As reported earlier, nurture groups can support pupils to make this transition (Kouroulaki, 2013).

## Structural changes

No UK evidence on structural change as an intervention to reduce exclusion was located. Changes to timetables, class size and subject choice are, however, often argued for and evidenced in the international school change and inclusion literatures (e.g. Wrigley, Thomson and Lingard, 2012; Smyth, 2016). Smaller class size is always offered as a key positive in research on alternative provision (see literature reviews by Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016; Tate and Greatbatch, 2017) and in expert discussions (Social Enterprise Coalition, 2010). These smaller classes not only assist teachers spending time on individual pupils, but also help to create what is referred to by practitioners in these sites as a 'family' environment. In interview based research on alternative provision in Australia (Mills and McGregor, 2014; McGregor et al., 2017), pupils often complained about the ways in which they were lost or ignored in large mainstream classes and hence why they preferred the classroom environment of the alternative site.

## Teacher development

McFarlane and Marks Woolfson's (2013) survey of teachers found that those who have more in-service experience of managing pupils' social, emotional and behavioural difficulties were more likely to be accepting of such pupils as well as more effective in managing their behaviours. This finding is potentially significant, they say, given many teachers' reluctance to have pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) in their classrooms. In an international literature review of teacher strategies for effective intervention with pupils deemed as having SEMH, Cooper (2011) identifies five approaches to dealing with such difficulties. He categorises the different approaches as: psychodynamic, behaviourist, humanistic, cognitive behavioural, and systemic. Each of these approaches is regarded as having benefits. However, the demarcation of causes of the behaviours is not always easy to determine. For example, he claims that some behaviours that might appear as being the product of a classroom issue, may actually have been caused by a wider, more systemic problem.

## Special educational needs

Across the REA, special educational needs were referenced predominantly in relation to SEMH. Population groups referred to included pupils with intellectual disabilities (see for example, Mowatt, 2010). However, across the items, it was generally difficult to untangle the mix of learning and social and behavioural issues being discussed. Of note is the substantial, and increasing, amount of literature dealing with autism and exclusion, and teachers' abilities to support autistic young people (Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren and Pellicano 2017; Grindle et al., 2012; Holt, Lea and Bowlby, 2012). This is perhaps, as Bradley (2016) has indicated, because of a growing awareness of pupils with autism attending mainstream school (see also AGGPA, 2017). Grindle et al. (2012), studied a small group of children aged 3-7 years with autism who participated in a two year therapeutic classroom in a mainstream school. They found that the children improved

their academic outcomes as well as behavioural outcomes in comparison with a control group who did not participate in a similar therapeutic intervention. They concluded that such an approach could be successfully implemented in mainstream schools.

Similar findings and conclusions were evident in the work of Bradley (2016) with autistic pupils who participated in a peer mentoring programme and were assessed using a standardised Self-Esteem Questionnaire, Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale and Anti-Bullying Alliance survey. These findings were important given that autistic pupils have high levels of exclusion from school (Sproston et al., 2017; Brede et al., 2017). Grindle et al. (2012) also emphasised the importance of parental support for the success of their programme. This was consistent with much of the literature on supporting autistic children, which noted the importance of enhanced school-parental communication (for example, Sproston, Sedgewick and Crane 2017). The importance of home-school communication is demonstrated by interviews with parents who describe their negative experiences of mainstream schools (Brede et al., 2017).

## **Question 2: Why are pupils referred to Alternative Provision?**

The evidence base on reasons for referral is drawn primarily from case studies. Case studies were always small-scale, and often had a purposive sample designed to focus on best practice or processes. Methods ranged from ethnography to mixed methods and were focused either on individual schools or individual, largely secondary age pupils.

No UK research specifically addressing this question was found. However, research into exclusion and alternative education more generally usually included an examination of the histories or problems of young people at school and their pathways into alternative provision (e.g. Gazeley, Marrable, Brown and Boddy, 2015; McCluskey, Lloyd, Riddell and Fordyce, 2013).

The most common reason given in the literature for referral by schools was inappropriate behaviour (Macleod, 2010; Mowat, 2015; Parker, Paget, Ford and German-Jones, 2016). This applied to students who were violent or persistently broke rules; over time schools felt that they had run out of options for the student and/or the behaviour interfered with the education of others. Referral was sometimes associated with diagnosed special educational needs (e.g. Jull, 2008; O'Connor, Burton and Torstensson, 2011; Armstrong, 2014; Sheffield and Morgan, 2017). Some literatures also refer to criminal offending behaviour (McCrystal, Percy and Higgins, 2007) and mental health issues (Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot, 2007; Solomon and Nashat, 2010; Paget, Parker Heron, Logan, Henry et al 2017).

Shared understandings about reasons for exclusion and referrals between teachers in the same school appear to be an issue. Concerns have been expressed about the diversity of interpretations of acceptable behavioural limits; even within one school, staff can have very different views of what behaviours are unacceptable, with some teachers

accepting what others would not (Hatton, 2013). There may be unconscious bias at work: the UK literatures include two studies which examined secondary data to show distinctive age, class and gender patterns in exclusions and referrals. Poor, male, black British and Roma and Irish traveller pupils are more likely to be excluded (Smith, 2009; Paget, Parker Heron, Logan, Henley et al., 2017). Other researchers who have examined official statistics (Wright, Standen and Patel, 2009; Maguire and Pratt-Adams, 2009; Parsons, 2009; Kane, 2010; Vincent, 2012; Gazeley and Dunne, 2013; Searle, 2017) agree that poverty, race and gender are strongly implicated in school behavioural norms and rules, and their interpretation. However, some of the groups that are prominent in exclusion data, for example Roma, Irish Travellers and black British students, do not appear in the expected numbers of referrals to alternative providers (Parsons, 2016; 2017).

Some schools appear to have more difficulty in addressing troubling behaviours than others. A questionnaire of 548 randomly selected primary, secondary and academy schools (Nash, Schlosser and Scarr, 2016) reveals that school concerns with academic results often outweighs individual pupils' socio-emotional needs. Small case studies where students are interviewed, often report that students see their school exhibiting a lack of fairness in dealing with behavioural incidents (e.g. Butler, 2011). Similar views have been expressed by parents, according to case study researchers (Sime, Fasserta and McClung, 2017; Sproston, Sedgewick, and Crane, 2017). However, focus group research on managed moves (Flitcroft and Kelly, 2016) and best practice in alternative provision (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016) does indicate that schools committed to making the process work to prevent exclusion do see alternative provision as integral to reversing a troubled school experience and exercise considerable care in referral (see also earlier discussion of managed moves).

### **Question 3: How do schools use Alternative Provision?**

There were no studies found which had this as their primary research question. Studies which addressed alternative provision more generally sometimes included a question about school use of alternative provision. Case studies of part-time complementary provision (The Princes Trust, 2016; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2017) demonstrate that schools see part-time and short-term alternative provision as a respite for both student and school as well as providing opportunities for pupils to experience success, learn new skills and re-evaluate their motivations and aspirations. A study mapping alternative provision across two counties (Russell and Thomson, 2013) shows that recreational, vocational, therapeutic and arts based fixed-term part-time alternative provision are seen by schools as a way to provide personal development and routes to improved further education and employment outcomes. Studies of managed moves (Abdelnoor, 2007; Vincent Harris, Thomson and Toalster, 2008) show that the new school to which pupils were transferred often used part-time alternative provision as part of the transfer process. Students began part-time at their new school whilst also being part-time at

complementary alternative provision. The alternative provision provided additional support for the 'fresh start'.

Two case studies (Barker, Alldred, Watts and Dodman, 2010; Gilles, 2016) investigating the use of in-school alternatives argue that schools can use alternative provision as an 'out of sight, out of mind' strategy. They found that the onus for change can be placed on the pupils rather than on mainstream practices. The outcomes of in-school alternative provision were fragile: as in off-site long-term alternative provision, short-term gains made in the alternative provision were rapidly lost unless there was substantive ongoing academic and emotional support. This only happens if the school recognises that both students and school practices need to change.

There are other concerns about schools' use of AP. For example, the school practice of pre-purchasing alternative provision places which are used during the year sometimes leads to an inappropriate 'fit' between student and alternative provision programme. Pre-purchase is sometimes encouraged by providers (Thomson and Russell, 2007) and local authorities as a means of ensuring financial sustainability. More concerning are reports that claim some schools use alternative provision as a way to illegally remove students and that there are unacceptably large numbers of young people enrolled only in part-time alternative provision and missing their statutory entitlement to education (Butler, 2011; Centre for Social Justice, 2011; Children's Commissioner, 2013; McCluskey, Riddell, Weedon and Foddyce, 2016; Ofsted, 2011, 2016; Gill, 2017).

## **Question 4: What does quality look like in Alternative Provision?**

AP is provided by pupil referral units, further education colleges, AP Academies and AP free schools and a range of national, regional and local organisations, including charities (see Thomson and Pennacchia (2014)). Schools generally have a choice of the alternative provision that they use and they, or the LA, often purchase places. In this sense, alternative provision can be understood as a market. This alternative provision market has had little attention in the research literatures, although there are three exceptions. The DfE ran an AP commissioning pilot in which funds normally held by the LA were devolved to schools so that they themselves could commission alternative provision that was needed for their pupils. They had the option of combining funds across schools and developing their own in-school provision. The evaluation of the commissioning trial (IoE and NFER, 2013, 2014) and a two county AP mapping and case study project (Thomson and Russell, 2007) both showed that the AP market was financially insecure, changeable, had distinct gaps and was of varying quality. Most recently, the DfE commissioned ISOS Partnership to conduct primary research among local authorities, schools and APs on the alternative provision market in their area (ISOS Partnership 2018). The research found that local authorities employ a variety of

approaches to using AP, from reactive – in terms of fulfilling their statutory responsibility to find places for pupils who were not in mainstream school – to proactive, focusing on a more strategic approach to using AP to foster inclusion, build mainstream capacity, and prevent long-term placements. The research identified key characteristics of an effective local AP system as being / requiring: having the right quantity of local AP; having a suitable range of AP to meet diverse pupil needs and to provide a range of support options and pathways; having good quality local AP provision assured through a well-developed QA framework; collective understanding of local resources available for AP to enable informed strategic choices and equitable access to support; clear understanding of the responsibilities of schools; strategic planning with tight, informed and responsive commissioning; AP providers responding to local need; agreed performance measures aligned to strategic priorities; and flexible use of funding to incentivise inclusion and support strategic priorities.

Ofsted (2011, 2016) and the then Centre for British Teachers Trust (CfBT) (now Education Development Trust) (Gutherson, Davies and Daskiewicz, 2011) have referred to the difficulties experienced by individual schools in the AP referral process. They argue that finding out what alternative provision is locally available can be difficult, and schools understandably tend to rely on existing networks and experience to locate suitable alternative provision options. Registers of providers are often out of date and not useful: the Taylor review of alternative provision (Taylor, 2012) recommended that the central register held by DfE be removed. Schools sometimes choose national rather than smaller providers, who run on a project by project basis, because of their perceived quality assurance processes (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). Schools and LAs have experienced difficulties in ensuring that there is sufficient quality alternative provision to meet the diverse needs of students (The Research Base, 2013). Many schools have limited geographical access to a range of alternative provision (Gill, 2017) particularly in rural areas. It is also difficult for small AP providers, including PRUs, to support the wide range of academic needs and interests that their referred pupils might present (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). Furthermore, some vocational provision is highly gendered, as discussed earlier.

Assessing quality can be difficult. There are different opinions about what counts as quality alternative provision with some providers, for example, stressing the importance of personal development as a path to academic attainment whilst others focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills and/or successful transitions back to mainstream school or into post-16 destinations. Ofsted does inspect registered alternative provision and makes judgements on the quality of education provided, looking particularly at safeguarding, curriculum provision and attainment, however often under different handbooks. They have been particularly concerned about educational progress and ensuring that students have access to the same kinds of learning opportunities as would be available in mainstream schools. The evaluation of alternative provision commissioning pilots (IoE

and NFER, 2013, 2014) and managed moves (Harris, Vincent, Thomson and Toalster, 2006) found that some schools also 'inspect' alternative provision in order to ensure its suitability and quality. According to Thomson and Russell (2009) some local authorities visit AP providers, although most approach quality primarily via templates and registers; there are difficulties in maintaining and updating these. National AP providers point out that sometimes they are quality inspected by multiple institutions; they see this is an inefficient approach (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014).

Only one UK based case study research project directly focused on the question of quality (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). The study concluded that the issue of workforce recruitment, selection, training, management and promotion was key to quality and that staff, particularly in full-time AP, needed specialist training in counselling, special needs and curriculum development and adaptation. Larger providers were better able to offer staff training and promotion opportunities than smaller organisations. In concert with CFBT literature review (Gutherson, Davies and Daskiewicz, 2011) this study concluded that a quality kite-mark scheme - focused on processes of referral, communication with referring school and family, support for special needs, curriculum provision, and supervision, training and development of staff – might be beneficial to schools and AP providers alike.

## **Question 5: What are the processes of exclusion and referral to AP?**

The evidence base on exclusion and processes for referring to alternative provision is relatively weak. Referral processes documented in the literature generally cover both post exclusion and prevention of exclusions. Studies of full-time alternative provision often detail good and poor practice in school referral processes from the point of view of the alternative provider (see Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). There is very little from the perspective of the LA (exceptions include, Parsons, 2009; Hallam & Rogers, 2008). The small UK research corpus on school views and experiences of referral processes, including the DfE exclusion trials (IoE and NFER, 2014) is comprised entirely of case study and expert accounts; these rarely include direct observation of process. Self-reporting is subject to considerable personal interpretation. While some researchers have had access to individual pupil case files (e.g. Carlile, 2009), such documents only report the results of processes, not their conduct. It seems that researchers have been unable to gain entry to school exclusion meetings, nor see how Fair Access Protocols are enacted.

There is therefore very little research which focuses directly on the fixed-term exclusion processes used by schools and permanent exclusion processes used by schools and local authorities. No studies were located which followed pupils through the school exclusion process and the local authority practices. Bagley and Hallam's (2016, 2017)

case study of a local authority examined the role of school psychologists in school exclusion processes, concluding that they could ensure that communication was effective and that the chosen alternative provision was appropriate for the student. The researchers also examined the processes used in managed moves, indicating that success could be impeded if a 'problem' was simply moved around without additional intervention.

Expert reports (e.g. DCSF, 2008; LGA, 2012; The Research Base, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, 2014-5) provide more detail about the exclusion and referral processes and are generally very concerned with effectiveness. Some academic research does include an examination of exclusion and referral (McCluskey at al 2013; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016), but this, as noted earlier, is usually well before permanent exclusion. Some local authorities host panels to deal with full-time referrals to PRUs and managed moves: these can be in the case of students at risk of permanent exclusion as well as those permanently excluded. Researchers appear to have been unable to gain access to those local authorities that have Fair Access Panels, nor access to their minutes.

While not part of the formal referral process, AP providers routinely hold their own entry meetings with parents and independently with teachers from referring schools (McCluskey at al 2013; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). Case information is passed from the referring school to the AP provider. Professionals working in alternative provision are sometimes ambivalent about this information, preferring to assess the pupil for themselves. Most full-time AP providers administer socio-emotional and learning tests as part of the entry process.

The referral and placement process is not without its problems. Communication between teachers, schools, LAs and alternative providers is said to be a significant issue in formal referral processes (Daniels and Cole. 2010, Parker, Paget, Ford and Gwernan-Jones, 2016). Accordingly, Rechten and Tweed (2014) trialled a professional learning intervention with teachers aiming to improve communication practice: teachers were positive about its potential. Thomson and Pennacchia's (2016) study of 17 alternative providers demonstrated considerable delays in APs receiving information from schools, and of schools not wanting any information about pupils' progress in alternative provision prior to reintegration. On the other hand, mainstream schools also reported that some APs did not provide them with relevant information about pupil progress.

There are concerns (e.g. McCluskey, Riddell, Weedon and Fordyce, 2016) about adherence to the mandated procedures, that is, about whether the right process is followed. Additionally, legal researchers (Ferguson and Weber, 2015) have raised unease about whether the process is right, that is whether the exclusion processes meet the legal requirements for representation, due process and right of appeal (see also Ogg and Kalill, 2010, Children's Commissioner, 2011, 2012; Coram Children's Legal Centre,

2016). There is potential for injustice if parents and pupils are not aware of their rights during the exclusion process. Research (Parker, Paget, Ford and German-Jones, 2016; Hodge and Wolstenholme, 2016) on parent experience has queried whether sufficient information about exclusion and referral is provided to parents and whether they are provided with adequate support throughout the process. Gazaley (2012) has also raised the problem of the impact of social class in schools' exclusion processes: her qualitative study showed that the interactions between professionals and mothers perpetuated an intergenerational cycle of social and educational disadvantage. Gazaley's work with professionals and mothers, indicated that some mothers from low socio-economic backgrounds found being interviewed uncomfortable, that they had little experience in negotiating bureaucratic frameworks and were thus less likely to challenge or appeal decisions made at the school level.

## **Question 6: How are students reintegrated into mainstream?**

The evidence base on the reintegration of young people from AP back into mainstream is relatively thin. At present, researchers rely largely on the impressions of AP providers. For AP providers, reintegration usually constitutes both returning to a mainstream school and successful integration into the workforce: generally, reintegration is taken by AP providers to mean either the referring school or another educational or work destination (e.g. traineeship or apprenticeship). There is no large-scale comparative case study research focused on reintegration and very little longitudinal research, an important gap given the nature of the issue and its focus on transition. There is also little research which directly addresses the destinations of permanently excluded students after AP. Many full-time AP providers believe that very few students return successfully to the mainstream (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). This is hard to verify as very few AP providers have reliable tracking data beyond the immediate post alternative provision destination.

Recent survey data from research by the ISOS Partnership for the DfE (ISOS 2018) suggests that returning to a mainstream destination is more likely for younger children, with 65% of pupils placed in AP in primary returning to any mainstream destination (excluding employment), 64% in Key Stage 3, dropping to 58% in Year 10, 46% in Year 11 and 42% in Key Stage 5. When employment destinations are added to this picture, the data suggest that the proportion of pupils moving into a mainstream education or employment destination remains relatively consistent for school-age children (between 59% and 65%), but drops slightly for Key Stage 5 pupils (53%).

Researchers have attempted to rectify the destination information gap. A three year longitudinal tracking study of 24 young people in alternative provision (Pirrie, Macleod, Cullen and McCluskey, 2011) found that secondary school aged pupils were unlikely to reintegrate into school and were at a far greater risk of a variety of negative outcomes - prolonged periods out of education and/or employment; poor mental and physical health;

involvement in crime; and homelessness - than young people who had no alternative provision experience. A Northern Ireland study (Kilpatrick, McCartan and McKeown, 2007) which compared, over a calendar year, the pathways taken by young people in AP with their peers found that few reintegrated into mainstream schools, and they gained less accreditation and made poorer transitions to the labour market.

The 2003 longitudinal study commissioned by the DfE (Daniels, Cole, Sellman et al., 2003, Daniels and Cole, 2010) remains the largest longitudinal study following students to their post-16 destinations; 193 secondary school students who had experienced exclusion were tracked. Approximately 50% of these young people were in education, training or employment two years after their permanent exclusion which had occurred when they were 16 and under. The other half were unemployed. The researchers found that the key factors which led to positive outcomes were that:

- The young people had belief in their own abilities;
- Ongoing support after the permanent exclusion from link-worker or other skilled local authority staff (this was policy at the time);
- Supportive family members or friends who helped to 'network' the young people into their communities;
- The young people feeling that their permanent exclusion had been unjust – counter-intuitively, these young people wanted to 'show' that they could succeed.

Although often based on small-scale qualitative research among pupils and teachers, researchers who have studied reintegration agree about what makes for a successful return to education, albeit, often with a slightly different emphasis on the order of priorities. A case study in one Welsh region (Thomas, 2015) which followed young people from a PRU back into school found that reintegration depended, in order of importance, on: family support, the inclusiveness of the receiving school's ethos, length of time away from mainstream, receiving school staff training, ongoing mentoring and support from the PRU, pupil perceptions, and local authority psychologist and counselling support. Pupil literacy and numeracy was least important, followed by school size, key stage, age, class size and gender. While this case study is only of one PRU in Wales, and the number of participants is not given, its factor analysis is of potential interest in England.

A doctoral study which explored in-depth the experiences of five young people who successfully reintegrated, (Grandison, 2011) suggests that strong collaboration between the AP and mainstream school allowed for phased reintegration and personalisation. Studies which centre on the student experience, point to the primacy of positive student-teacher relationships with at least one staff member in the mainstream school in reintegration (Goodman and Burton; 2010, Hart, 2013; Brede et al. 2017).

Jalali and Morgan (2017) interviewed 13 primary and secondary pupils: they argue that students are more likely to reintegrate successfully if their schools are inclusive, practice restorative justice, have person-centred development goals and planning and offer counselling training to teachers. Another small-scale study (9 pupil interviews) found that attention to underlying mental health issues and students' prior experiences can help students return to the mainstream (Sheffield and Morgan, 2017).

There is some evidence about problems in reintegration. A small study of 12 PRU and local authority staff (Lawrence, 2011) claimed that, in the worst cases, barriers to reintegration included schools refusing to have the student back, lack of inclusive practice in the school, and a difficult relationship between the school and AP provider in which negative/unrealistic expectations, withholding of information and lack of staff skills led to uninformed decisions. A case study of managed moves (Bagley and Hallam, 2015) shows that a second chance can be hindered by inter-school tensions (lack of honesty and information sharing), negative narratives and language around young people, and inaccurate diagnosis; these insights are also helpful in understanding the challenges of reintegration.

One particular group of pupils for whom reintegration is important are those who have been in hospital. While this is a different group from excluded pupils, some of the issues regarding reintegration which apply to excluded pupils also apply to those returning to school from long stays in hospital. As a PhD thesis from Birmingham University indicates, students with chronic illness should be considered a 'vulnerable group' (Pelter, 2015). An older report from Manchester University (Farrel and Harris, 2003) argued that pupils returning to school from hospital needed many of the same practices that support young people in alternative provision, i.e. they need to be 'owned' by their mainstream school, and be offered flexibility, interagency support and responsiveness. Similar findings were evident in a recent review of educational provision for children unable to attend school for medical reasons (Mintz et al., 2018). In this review the most successful approaches entailed multidisciplinary teams - patient, parents, doctors, nurses, therapists, educational psychologists, and mainstream schools – collaborating. There is little other UK research on this group and little internationally. The REA located two relevant international studies. The first, a practitioner study from Finland (Äärelä, Määttä and Uusiautti, 2016) stressed the importance of the school working closely with the family and with the student as well as with the permanent school in relation to programme and pedagogy. The second US study (Shaw and McCabe, 2008), argued that for children with chronic illnesses, hospital-to-school transitions need to be carefully managed in ways that balance the needs of the school, for example avoiding frequent disruptions to the class, with the on-going health care needs of the students, for example, frequent absences.

## Gaps in the evidence

Across all of the research questions there were gaps in the evidence. Very little of the research used systematic reviews, randomised control trials, cohort studies, case control studies and in-depth ethnographic studies. However, methods need to be tailored to the research questions and much of the case study research located by this REA has been appropriate for the questions asked. There is also a wealth of untapped secondary data, for example, the Millennium Cohort Study and the National Child Development Study, which also offer potential for future research. Commissioned and expert reports have been a significant source of information for sections of this REA. However, there is little independent corroboration of the evidence provided in reports and expert witness accounts about how schools, for example, refer to and use alternative provision.

There is a major evidence gap on what happens to the population of young people who go through various forms of alternative education. The effectiveness of AP in addressing the educational needs of pupils cannot be determined without tracking the population of excluded young people and those who are in AP as an exclusion prevention measure. Secondary data, including government and cohort studies, would enable a consideration of what happens to these young people in terms of employment, further education, and their well-being and life chances. Accompanying these analyses of 'big data' with representative case studies, for example, the Everyday Childhoods and Inventing Adulthoods studies at Sussex University (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg, 2018), would give explanatory power to the findings from these large quantitative studies.

Specific gaps and key opportunities in relation to each of the specific questions are now discussed, along with consideration of how far these are addressed in the rest of this report.

Question one asked what schools are doing to prevent exclusion. The REA identified a strong body of case study evidence indicating the two types of approach to this: changing the young person or changing the school. However, there were some significant omissions. There were no comparisons of either different student or school focused interventions, so making judgements about their efficacy and cost-effectiveness is not possible. There was very little focus on the ways in which schools personalise curriculum and pedagogy in order to engage young people 'at risk of exclusion', and accelerate their academic progress and improve behaviour at the same time. While the evidence from alternative education stresses the importance of young people's agency and voice to prevent exclusion, this is largely absent from research in schools (de Leeuw, de Boer & Minnaert, 2018). Despite the focus on special education and 'at riskness', there was less attention paid to interagency work and pastoral care. Further research is required on family focused approaches that take an education orientation, for example, those that explore programs offered through schools enabling parents to support their children's academic progress. There are also opportunities for comparative case studies using

schools that make no use of alternative provision, schools that use internal AP and those that use external AP. This report provides some comparative evidence across schools who make varying use of AP, although it is based on interviews with head teachers, other staff, pupils and parents, rather than more in-depth, observational school case studies, and thus provides a more 'high-level' view. Valdebenito et al. (2018) raised concerns about the sustainability of gains from interventions designed to prevent exclusions, there is thus more work required on the long-term effects of particular interventions. While this report explores schools' views of what works in preventing exclusions, and why (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the range of preventative approaches taken by schools, and their views on effectiveness), it does not seek to evaluate specific approaches or interventions. There is also a need for further research on the work of non-education staff in preventing exclusions, for example, social workers, counsellors, and school-based police officers. Additionally, it would be helpful to understand the relationship better between formal exclusion by schools and 'self-exclusion' by students; through truancy and school refusal.

Question two examined the reasons why pupils were referred to alternative provision. Given the importance of early intervention, the evidence gap in early childhood and primary school exclusions and referrals to AP are concerning. There is almost no research of any kind into the reasons for early childhood and primary age children being referred to alternative provision. The REA found evidence of reasons for referral from staff and pupils already in alternative provision; there was little from the perspective of those working in a referring mainstream school. The research in this report addresses this gap (see Chapter 3).

Question three asked about how schools use alternative provision. The research discussed in this report investigating the use of alternative provision by schools helps to meet the evidence gap on this topic. Larger scale and purposeful comparative in-depth case studies could also be informative: more detailed ethnographies would also allow deeper insights on policies and practices. It is important to note, however, that school autonomy means that it may be difficult to gain permission to conduct research that could reveal questionable behaviours.

Question four focused on the quality of AP. There is clearly room for further research on both how the alternative provision 'market' is used by schools and how quality is determined, though this is covered within the recent ISOS report for DfE (ISOS 2018). These are difficult areas to investigate, but purposive case-control and/or effectiveness studies could provide more nuanced evidence about the kinds of AP processes that produce a range of benefits for students.

Question five addressed the processes of exclusion and referral. There is a research gap that examines the 'black box' of exclusion and referral and compares the different approaches taken in different schools and local authorities. Legal researchers

(Valdebenito et al., 2018) have recommended an investigation of parents' understandings of the exclusion and referral processes and of the role of Special Educational Needs specialist staff. Parents' qualitative experiences of the exclusion and referrals processes are explored in Chapter 4 of this report. It would also be possible to design intervention studies at local authority level or conduct naturally occurring comparative case studies of processes across the four UK nations. Given the presence in the grey literature of reports of off-rolling students in order to maintain test results (see also Gill, 2017), it is important that more in-depth research is conducted to ascertain connections between this 'off-rolling' and rates of referral to AP.

Question six was concerned with the ways in which pupils reintegrated into the mainstream after being in alternative provision or in hospital. This is addressed in Chapter 6 of this report, in terms of school and AP perceptions of 'what works' to support young people's reintegration, and what hinders it. As noted earlier, there is certainly a need for further large-scale work on school destinations as well as studies which track students through schooling to post school options. In both the US and Australia there are detailed life history research projects into the lives of young people in alternative provision; these are often highly revealing about processes as well as attitudes and experiences. Trials of the ways in which information technologies can be used - to enhance communication between AP sites and schools, provide mentoring opportunities for students, and engage those young people for whom personal interactions are difficult - might assist reintegration (see Evans, 2007, Sefton Green, 2016; Daniels and Cole, 2010).

Further work is also needed on the best ways for young people who have been in hospitals for extended periods to be reintegrated into the mainstream. There is also a need for more detailed and in-depth research on the relationship between exclusions and young people categorised as NEET. Also absent is a consideration of how educational opportunities are being provided for those who have left school for long periods of time in what has been referred to as 'second chance schooling' (Gallagher, 2011).

The REA largely excluded international literatures: it only considered international literature that related directly to the research questions and consisted of systematic reviews, RCTs and cohort studies. Work has been done internationally on the kinds of curriculum frameworks that might support accelerated learning in alternative provision and the kinds of adaptations that mainstream schools might make to assist reintegration. There are also models of support for teenage parents, inclusive employment programmes, working with key community groups and actors, youth community participation programmes (c.f. Australian work by Smyth, Angus, Down and McInerney, 2009; Mills and McGregor, 2016, te Riele, 2009).

The REA demonstrated that while there was some relevant research about exclusions and referrals to AP, there is an opportunity to develop a more coherent and large scale

set of studies that would demonstrate, over time, best practice in alternative provision. The remainder of this investigative report into alternative provision sets out schools', APs', parents' and pupils' experiences and explores what they found to be effective and ineffective about current practice in alternative provision, and why, but it does not provide a formal evaluation.

## Chapter 3: Identifying and supporting pupils at risk of exclusion

This and the following chapters discuss findings from telephone interviews with 276 schools and 200 Alternative Providers, as well as 25 in-depth case studies with Alternative Providers, including interviews with staff, parents and pupils.

This chapter examines how schools identify and support pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction. Firstly, it discusses the processes that schools have in place to identify such pupils, and how their needs are assessed. This is followed by a discussion of the strategies schools use to support these pupils, and how effective these strategies are considered to be. Finally, the chapter summarises how schools use off-site direction and managed moves as alternatives to exclusion and the extent to which Local Authority (LA) support is used to support schools' prevention strategies.

### Chapter summary

The majority of schools took active steps to identify pupils perceived to be at risk of exclusion or off-site direction and intervened early to try to prevent exclusions or off-site direction being required. Schools used a range of monitoring tools. In terms of identifying pupils at risk, behaviour logging systems tracking breaches of the school's behaviour policy, alongside monitoring risk factors such as attendance, appeared to work well *in combination with* other approaches. These included input from pastoral staff and taking into account the pupil's background and characteristics when taking action. Schools recognised that taking a more tailored approach was particularly important when dealing with pupils with SEND, and especially among pupils with autism.

Schools tended to source and plan support for pupils at risk of exclusion internally initially. Most had recourse to external support from their LA and other professional services: the ones who have used this were generally positive, but access to LA and other professional services was limited by the timeliness and availability of such services, and budget restraints. The main strategies that schools put in place to prevent exclusions were aligned with those identified in the REA, including mentoring, temporary withdrawal (either to internal inclusion units or short-term/ part-time AP), bringing in specialist external support or assessment services, and changes to individual timetabling.

As discussed in the REA, there was a lack of 'hard evidence' evaluating the impacts of specific preventative strategies. Schools often felt that approaches taken had helped prevent exclusions but had no formal evaluation in place to determine the efficacy of their policies and processes.

## Identifying pupils at risk of exclusion

Schools that had excluded pupils in the past 12 months were asked what proportion of these pupils they had previously identified as being at risk. Findings suggest that the majority of schools feel that they are good at identifying pupils at risk of exclusion: four in five primary schools, and three in five secondary schools, estimated that they had previously identified at least four-fifths of these pupils as being at risk. Special schools typically said all students who had been excluded had been identified as being at risk.

However, there were some examples of secondary schools who said only a minority or none of the students who had been excluded in the last 12 months had previously been identified as being at risk. While some of these reported only one permanent exclusion in the last 12 months, the majority reported more than five, and some reported more than 20 in the last year. We discuss strategies that schools use to identify at risk pupils later in this section. The schools that had identified only a minority or none of the students who were eventually excluded did not appear to differ in their prevention strategies from those who reported identifying a greater proportion of at risk pupils.

While this research finds that most schools had identified the majority of students excluded in the last 12 months as being at risk, it also suggests that the measures they subsequently put in place to prevent exclusion have not always been effective. Primary schools who had made exclusions were particularly likely to have previously identified the pupil(s) concerned, with three-quarters reporting they had identified this risk for all the pupils that were excluded. This is likely to relate to the much lower number of pupils who are excluded at primary level.

More than nine in ten schools had at least one process in place for identifying pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction. Schools that had referred pupils to AP in the last 12 months were especially likely to have an early identification process in place. Compared with special schools, mainstream schools were slightly more likely, and independent schools slightly less likely, to report having such processes in place.

Monitoring pupil behaviour was by far the most common way that schools identified those at risk of permanent or fixed-term exclusion or off-site direction. Schools viewed persistent low-level incidents, especially those which required escalation to more senior staff, as a major sign that a pupil was at risk of exclusion. More severe bad behaviour, such as aggression or harming others, would lead schools to consider exclusion more quickly. There were occasions where a one-off incident of severe bad behaviour would immediately lead to a school considering exclusion.

In the interviews, one assistant Headteacher explained:

*“Flags include continual persistent disruption. Other incidents include verbal abuse of a member of staff, physical abuse, smoking, drug related incidents, which are escalated faster and may result in a fixed-term exclusion.”*

**Assistant Headteacher, mainstream academy, secondary, Yorkshire and The Humber**

Most schools kept track of behaviour incidents through behaviour logging systems which they used to record breaches of the school’s behaviour policy or code. Around three-quarters of secondary schools and around half of primary schools made use of such systems, which allow schools to monitor behaviour over time and more easily identify pupils who were frequently being sanctioned, any specific patterns of behaviour, or rapid declines in behaviour, which may put pupils at risk of exclusion. Behaviour logging systems were also the most common avenue among primary schools, with just over half of them using this approach. Schools who did not mention using a behaviour logging system tended to describe less formal ways of keeping track of breaches of behavioural policies, dealing with these on a more informal, case-by-case basis. This often involved carrying out risk assessments or having conversations with parents and pastoral staff.

Schools used various different systems but they all worked in a similar way. Some involved assigning a number of points to different behavioural incidents: schools could then identify the pupils that had accrued the highest number of points, who were flagged as being of concern. Other systems involved ‘traffic lights’, where pupils who had frequently behaved poorly, or had displayed severe poor behaviour, would be placed into the ‘red’ category. Pupils identified as being a potential for concern would then be kept under closer scrutiny and their progress would be discussed in regular meetings between senior leaders and other staff.

*“We have a behaviour monitoring system, SIMS. We log our behaviour incidents into that system. For example, today I requested a report on the highest profile ten students [pupils who accrued the most points] in each year group so I can have a look at what they’re doing, and what we’ve done so far to manage their behaviour.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, East Midlands**

Around one-third of primary and secondary schools alike mentioned that pupil history was considered when identifying and supporting pupils who may be at risk of exclusion or off-site direction. While this was not a flag in itself, awareness of this could mean that certain pupils were monitored more closely. For example, a pupil who had previously displayed aggressive behaviour before joining the school might be monitored more closely than other pupils. Schools also took pupil characteristics into account: for instance, a recognised SEND, or whether the pupil was looked after or designated as a

Child in Need (CiN), affected how those pupils were managed within the school. In cases where there was a formally *identified* SEND, for instance, schools reported that they took into account the way a pupil's condition might affect their behaviour, for example by approaching this as a symptom of the pupil's SEND rather than as purely 'bad behaviour', and hence providing the pupil with greater leeway in terms of the thresholds that might trigger exclusion, or implementing more pastoral support measures. This was not always the experience that was reported by parents (discussed in Chapter 4).

*“SEN is a totally different thing isn't it. Because [for example] we have children come into school with cerebral palsy or Down's syndrome, or there is challenging behaviour with autistic children, so that is something that we wouldn't be looking at [to identify those at risk of exclusion].”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, primary, East of England**

Some schools felt particularly able to take into account wider factors when identifying whether a pupil could be at risk of exclusion, such as family issues (e.g. marital breakdown), family history, or relationship with their peers. Such schools credited this to being smaller, enabling them to get to know pupils more closely than was possible in a larger school.

*“Because the school is small, all children are known by name and so things are more easily visible.”*

**Senior teacher, mainstream academy, secondary, West Midlands**

Around three in ten secondary schools, but fewer than one in ten primary schools, used rates of absenteeism as a way of identifying 'at risk' pupils. Persistent low attendance, or a sudden drop in attendance, was sometimes viewed as a trigger to consider pupils as potentially at risk of exclusion, although more generally, schools felt that persistent absenteeism often pointed to a lack of engagement in school, so this measure was usually used in association with other flags such as behavioural or attainment data.

Around one in four secondary schools regarded declining performance as something that would lead them to consider pupils as being at risk: this issue was raised much less commonly among primary schools. Schools saw a drop in academic performance as a sign that the pupil's engagement levels had dropped, rather than poor academic performance being a reason for concern on its own.

A minority of schools involved pastoral support staff in the process of identifying pupils at risk of exclusion (around one in four secondaries and one in six primaries). Where schools had strong internal pastoral support, these staff were involved in discussions about pupils who had been flagged because of poor behaviour. If a pupil was already

known to the pastoral staff at this stage, they could feed in their experiences of that pupil to any discussions about addressing their behaviour. Usually, if a pupil was not previously known to the pastoral staff, they would be referred to them for support at this point.

## **Assessing the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction**

Schools were asked what processes they have in place to assess what support pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction might need, and many were keen to point out that these differed according to the needs of the child. The schools who did this pointed to the importance of making assessment decisions on a case-by-case basis, according to the situation for each pupil. Such schools often did not follow a set procedure, but instead adjusted their response for each individual identified as being at risk.

*“It is working with the student; one to one conversations with that student to try to identify the students’ needs through their behaviour, to see what support they require and put that intervention in place and review that.”*

**Inclusion Manager, mainstream academy, secondary, North East**

Tailoring approaches based on the needs of the pupil was easier, and therefore more common, in smaller schools and in primary schools, who could be more flexible and agile in their responses to pupil needs.

*“We are a smaller school and this might make it easier, but it is about building relationships, getting to know those individuals. As a senior team we look at who knows that child best, who is going to be best suited to working with them. Instead of sending them all to a designated behaviour type member of staff we send them to the person we think they’ll get on with, or who has a good relationship with their parents.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, Yorkshire and the Humber**

The most common way that schools assessed the needs of pupils at risk was to access professional support, mentioned by around half of primary schools and a quarter of secondaries. The use of professional support for assessment was higher among primaries for a range of reasons. Primary schools tended to have less in-house specialist support (as they are smaller) and therefore greater reliance on external professionals. There is also an issue around the point of identification of SEND – by the time the pupil is in secondary, their SEND is likely to have already been identified/ diagnosed so the school can rely more on in-house pastoral support than needing to bring in professional assessment. The most frequent assessment professionals mentioned were educational

psychologists and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Other professionals included speech therapists and social workers.

A similar proportion of schools reached out to their Local Authority's Behavioural Support Team, or equivalent unit, where this was available. This was more common for primary schools than secondary schools. The LA Behavioural Support Team provided advice about what strategies were most useful, or could provide direct support.

*"We buy into a local service agreement (LSA) and there is opportunity there for a behaviour support team to come in and work with children if we feel that need is there - to work with specific children. If we feel it's appropriate we would escalate it to a 'TAF' (Team Around A Family) and if there is any support, there we would reach into that."*

**Headteacher, mainstream, primary, North East**

Around three in ten primaries and secondaries alike involved parents/ carers when assessing the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion, and this was slightly more common among independent schools. Whether schools chose to involve parents/ carers generally depended on what the school knew about the pupil's family background (for example, whether there was anything in their background to suggest involving the parents would not be of benefit to the child), and how engaged the parents/ carers were with the school and their child's education, as opposed to other factors such as pupil characteristics or the reasons they had been identified as being at risk of exclusion. Examples were given of not involving parents if they were known to have a particularly negative or unengaged relationship with the school or where there was a known history of family problems, such as domestic abuse, violence or alcohol or drug dependency. Where it was possible to involve parents/ carers, schools felt this was very valuable as it allowed for a more holistic assessment that considered factors outside of school, as well as inside.

*"The Head of Year invites parents in to look at the thresholds and try and find out if there is a home issue, or has it accumulated over time, or are there any needs that have been overlooked and may need investigating."*

**Assistant Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, Yorkshire and The Humber**

Around one-quarter of secondary schools (and one in eight primaries) used in-school mentoring and counselling as a way of opening up conversations with pupils to identify issues and discuss appropriate support needs. As discussed earlier, secondary schools were more likely to have this sort of resource internally, so were more likely to include counselling in their assessment process. Schools who did not have access to a trained counsellor would either reach out to external professionals or, where deemed appropriate, a teacher or an older pupil with a good relationship acted as a mentor for the 'at risk' pupil. For this to work well as a means of avoiding the risk of exclusion, the pupil

needed to feel comfortable with the mentor assigned to them to enable effective communication.

*“We look at our behaviour data and ensure that students who are suspended have a range of support we offer inside the school. It could be that they have a learning mentor assigned to them or a behaviour mentor assigned to them; they could be directed toward counselling. We have lots of different other support strategies for them such as anger management courses for them, they will take part in peer education where they are supported by an older pupil in school or learn how to become a peer mentor themselves and they mentor other students.”*

**Deputy Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, London**

A small number of schools used Boxall Profiles<sup>8</sup> or similar in their assessment of ‘at risk’ pupils. This sort of profiling provides an assessment of pupils’ social, emotional and behavioural development. These assessments are used to identify causes or triggers of poor behaviour or a lack of engagement. In conjunction with the experience of school staff, they can then use to determine pupil support needs. For example, a trigger could be poor literacy, leading to feelings of frustration in lessons that manifest as poor behaviour.

Around one-fifth of mainstream schools mentioned SEN assessments directly in the process of identifying pupil support needs. These were used to see if pupils had any unmet needs that, if addressed, could help to prevent exclusion. For example, disruptive behaviour in class was sometimes caused by pupils attempting to hide academic difficulties. Additionally, the school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) was frequently involved in internal meetings to assess the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion.

## **Supporting pupils at risk of exclusion to remain in school**

### **Sources of support**

Schools usually started with looking at support they could provide internally. This was because in-house support was the easiest and fastest to access and/or because of limited funding available within the school or from the Local Authority to pay for external support. Some schools reported that demand for external support outweighed supply,

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<sup>8</sup> The Boxall Profile is an assessment tool for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties among children and young people. For more information, see <https://boxallprofile.org/>

meaning that there can be long waits to access it. In other cases, there was no relevant support available.

Around one-third of schools sought advice from their LA when planning support, and this was more common among primary schools. Some schools applied to LAs for support that they were not able to offer themselves, for example counselling if they did not have anyone internally, or for advice about potential APs in the area that could be considered for temporary, short-term referrals.

*“Behavioural support tends to be done in-house. For other types of support like mental health we go to external agencies like CAMHS.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, North West**

## **Varying assessment and support approaches for specific groups of pupils**

Schools were asked whether they assessed and planned potential support needs for pupils at risk of exclusion differed by student characteristics such as SEND, Children in Need, Looked After Children and those with English as an additional language (EAL).

Just over half the schools said they adapted the way they assessed and planned for support needs according to different pupil types, and this was more common among secondary schools.

The most frequent group for whom schools adjusted this process was for SEND pupils, or when unidentified SEND were suspected. This was slightly more common in schools with an internal SEN support unit, as these were more likely to have the necessary expertise in place. In these cases, the school worked more closely with SEND experts such as the school SENCO, or external specialists. Schools were particularly sensitive to the needs of autistic pupils as they required different support to other pupils. This aligns with the findings of the REA which highlighted the growing amount of literature dealing with autism and exclusion, and teachers’ abilities to support autistic young people.

*“Children on the autistic spectrum are definitely demanding of intervention. We would talk to the parents and establish reasonable expectation, but we would allow them to have time out occasionally/have someone like the teaching assistants, other teachers or SEN team [at a level that would not be provided to other pupils].”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, primary, West Midlands**

The process was different for Looked After Children, among whom it was necessary to involve a wider range of individuals such as social workers and foster parents. Some schools mentioned particular reluctance about excluding Looked After Children, because

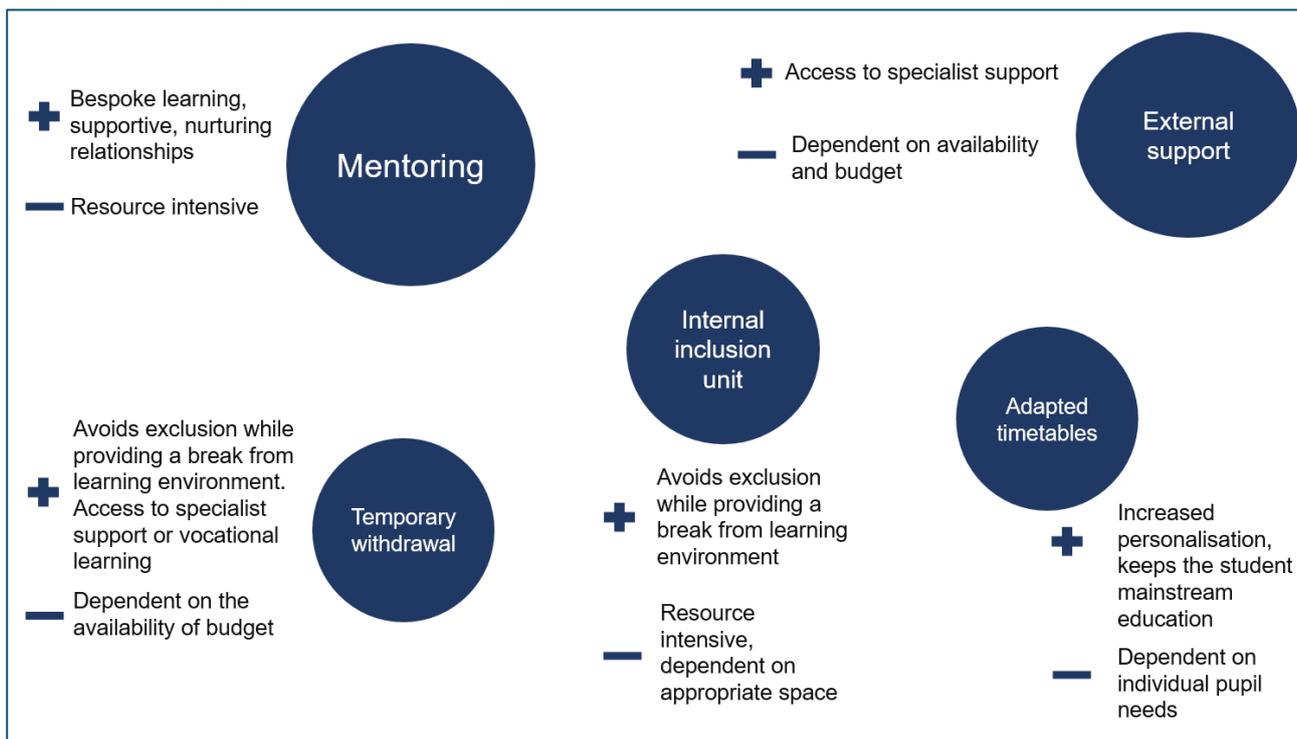
they felt these pupils required more emotional support and understanding than other pupils, and would be more negatively impacted by a move to AP. Another difference for Looked After Children is that schools received a higher rate of Pupil Premium Funding, which increased the range of support options available as schools were less constrained by costs (although this remained a consideration).

A minority of schools said the way they assessed Children In Need differed from other pupils. Schools where this did differ took a similar approach to their process for Looked After Children, typically involving a wider range of professionals than would be the case for a 'regular' pupil at risk of exclusion.

## **Key prevention strategies**

Schools were asked about the main strategies they employed to help pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction to remain in the school. They were then asked how effective they felt these strategies were, and whether they worked particularly well for specific types of pupil. The two most common approaches or strategies were student-centred, in the form of mentoring and internal inclusion units, a form of withdrawal programme (see the discussion of prevention strategies in Chapter 1). The next most common set of support strategies related to some of the school-centred interventions identified in the REA, including access to specialist support and assessment services, and changes to timetabling. Although schools highlighted the importance of good communication with parents/carers during this process, hardly any schools mentioned family-based interventions as a prevention strategy. The most commonly mentioned strategies, and their perceived strengths and weaknesses are shown in the figure below and discussed in more detail in the following sections.

**Figure 3.1 Key prevention strategies**



### Mentoring programmes

Three-quarters of secondary schools and half of primary schools used mentoring as a strategy to support pupils at risk of exclusion/ off-site direction to remain in mainstream education. This was more common in mainstream schools compared with special schools. Schools who had not used AP, or who reported no permanent exclusions in the last 12 months, were particularly likely to find mentoring effective. Some of these schools singled out mentoring as being an important element in reducing their previously much higher number of exclusions.

Mentoring offered one-to-one support and a stable point of contact for the pupil, with someone they could trust. The majority of schools that used mentoring found it effective and cited a number of benefits in terms of the pastoral support it provided to pupils, which helped to build their confidence and resilience, and gave them an open channel of communication at school, which they may not have at home, with whom they could build a stable relationship and talk through their issues.

*“Often the students who have behavioural difficulties don’t have a supportive home background, and they need one person that they can go to and have mentoring sessions each week to help them - have an adult - who is trusted and can speak to them about issues they are facing. For them this kind of support is vital.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, London**

There were also examples of schools who used *peer* mentoring effectively to reduce exclusions. Such schools judged that using older students as peer mentors was helpful for pupils at risk of exclusion, because they could see that others had dealt successfully with similar problems.

Schools considered that mentoring was most effective as a form of 'early action' in response to issues that were identified quickly or were less complex. It was less effective for longer term or more complex issues. Another limiting factor was that it was not always possible to find the right mentor. Schools found that mentoring only worked when mentors and pupils were paired well, and in some cases, it was not possible to find a good match. Schools also reported that the effectiveness of mentoring was dependent on resourcing; as relationships between students and mentors could only develop if staff had enough time to spend on this.

### **Internal inclusion units**

Over half of secondary schools used internal inclusion units to support pupils at risk of exclusion, whereas only a minority of primary schools did. This approach was also more likely to be used by mainstream schools, particularly academies. The use of inclusion units was less commonly mentioned by independent schools. Schools that used an internal inclusion unit often also used mentoring as a strategy to prevent exclusions. It was slightly less common however, for these schools to use external services in addition to the internal unit.

Schools that had internal inclusion units thought they offered a halfway point between excluding a pupil and keeping them in the mainstream classroom. These schools thought they provided some of the benefits of AP (smaller class sizes, taking pupils out of a conflict situation) without the negative connotations of being excluded from mainstream education. The nature of these units differed substantially among the schools that used them. In some schools, the emphasis was on exclusion and sanctioning: for example, they were referred to as 'sanction rooms' where students were taken out of their classes as a form of punishment and re-introduced either after a fixed period or once they showed an improvement in behaviour. In other schools, the emphasis was on keeping the student in isolation. Other schools however, positioned their unit as a more supportive environment where students could be offered more adjustment and tailoring than was possible in their usual class. This included one-to-one support, smaller group sizes and tailored approaches to learning. These schools often described the unit as an opportunity to give the student 'a break' from their usual learning environment or from their peer group, or to access the curriculum in a way better suited to them.

When internal inclusion was reported as effective, schools felt it worked because it gave pupils the time and space to reflect on the incidents that led them to be there. A few

schools noted that their internal inclusion units were new, so they had not yet assessed their effectiveness.

*“It allows internal reflection rather than putting them out on a fixed-term exclusion, because students do not want to be there. They students do not see it as the ultimate sanction and feel that they remain supported.”*

**Assistant Head of Inclusion, mainstream maintained, secondary, Yorkshire and the Humber**

Smaller schools struggled to find appropriate space for internal inclusion units, so found their effectiveness limited.

### **Temporary withdrawal**

It was fairly common for secondary schools to say they liaised with APs when planning support for pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction. This was particularly common in cases where they felt a temporary referral to AP was or could be a better option for the pupils than remaining in the school (without needing to use a formal fixed-term exclusion). Examples where a temporary referral to AP was considered by schools included:

- When behavioural issues with the pupil had been ongoing for a long period of time or had escalated, but remained below the point where formal exclusion was deemed appropriate
- When a pupil’s mental health or emotional issues meant that staying in school was having a negative impact on their health and wellbeing
- When it was felt a pupil would benefit from time out from school, or to give them the opportunity to complete vocational qualifications not offered by the school as an attempt to keep them engaged in education and improve their behaviour.

Alternatively, sometimes schools asked local APs for advice on whether they could be a good option for a pupil.

Schools were highly conscious of budgets when planning the best way to provide this type of support to at risk pupils. Sometimes, budget constraints meant that schools were not able to provide what they felt the pupil needed. Often, schools were conscious when contacting APs that they may not be able to afford the provision that would be most suitable.

*“It depends on what the nature of the support would be, what the cost would be, and whether we had the money. We are in a situation at the moment where if we had a child with particular needs, and even if we had the services we thought would benefit him, we would find it difficult to support that, budget-wise.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, primary, South East**

Note, this section has examined when schools consider temporary referrals to AP: Chapter 4 of the report discusses referrals to alternative provision particularly in relation to permanent and fixed-term exclusions. It also discusses the statutory guidance on the expectations of local authorities and maintained schools when commissioning alternative provision.

### **External support offered in school**

Just under half of schools brought in external support including educational psychologists, counsellors, CAMHS and drug/alcohol advisors to provide support for pupils at risk of exclusion. This was slightly more common among secondary schools, but less common among independent schools. It was slightly less common for schools that reported having internal exclusion units to say they used external support.

The reported effectiveness of external support varied. Although specialist support was seen as valuable, accessing it was often described as difficult. While the provision of internal support was often limited by the resource available, within the school, the use of external support was limited by school budgets. Other schools struggled with lack of available options in their local area, in particular rural schools. Where schools were able to access sufficient external support, they deemed it to be an effective option for pupils who needed more specialised interventions.

*“It’s dependent on their need as some of the external agencies are more effective than others, and it depends on access. If we have a child who is displaying the traits of social and emotional health issues, it’s very difficult to get CAMHS input.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, primary, South East**

*“It depends on the service you’re accessing... I’ve used a service which is about accessing children emotionally. They didn’t have a worker in this area... They gave me a worker in another area but there was an 8 week wait for that... So there are gaps within the system.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, West Midlands**

### **Adapted timetables**

Some schools adapted pupil’s individual timetables to support them to remain in school, either through building in more ‘time out’ or rationalising the number of subjects studied in the hope of increased focus and engagement on those remaining. Again, the perceived effectiveness of this approach varied. Some schools found that pupils responded well as they felt their needs were being listened to, while other pupils saw it as a ‘punishment’, potentially worsening their relationship with the school, and in turn worsening their behaviour.

*“It very much depends on their personality. Some pupils understand that they have been taken out of a specific lesson because of a significant issue within that subject, and others see it as a punishment because they don't want to be taken away from their friends, put somewhere different and treated differently.”*

**Assistant Head Teacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, North East**

It is worth noting that a commonality among most of the strategies described by schools as effective is an increased flexibility and tailoring to student needs, characteristics or personal situation. This may take the form of one-to-one learning or mentoring, outside the normal learning environment, or of adjustments to the timetable or to ways of accessing learning.

## **Schools' use of evidence for the effectiveness of support**

For many schools, the main evidence they had for the effectiveness of different approaches was low or reduced exclusion rates. Schools were rarely able to say an individual strategy or approach was the direct cause of their success, but rather it was felt to be the combination of initiatives, and the flexibility and tailoring to student needs, characteristics and situation that was important.

*“Ultimately our evidence is that we have never permanently excluded a child.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, primary, East Midlands**

Other evidence that schools cited for the efficacy of support was mostly informal, based on staff observations or reports, but also incorporating feedback from parents or carers. Many schools did not have one standard way of measuring effectiveness, as they regarded every pupil as different.

*“It is difficult to compare the different strategies as the cases at this school are so diverse.”*

**Behavioural Support Manager, mainstream maintained, primary, South East**

The same behaviour logging systems that are used to identify pupils with poor patterns of behaviour, were also a way of tracking behavioural improvements (in conjunction with other observations). These provided clear evidence to schools for when interventions with individual pupils had been effective. Generally, however, the findings from the school interviews support the REA finding that there is limited 'hard' evidence on the efficacy of different strategies to prevent school exclusion.

## Off-site direction

Under Section 29A of the Education Act 2002, schools can direct pupils off-site into alternative provision for the purpose of receiving education intended to improve their behaviour. In this respect it can be a preventative measure, as a way to avoid exclusion in the longer-term. Over three-quarters of secondary schools had used off-site direction in the last 12 months compared to around one-quarter of primary schools. Schools in urban areas were also more likely to have used off-site direction than those in rural areas, and this is likely to be because they had more education options in their vicinity. Similarly, off-site direction was more commonly mentioned by academies, who may have agreements with other schools within their trust.

The majority of schools reported that they had the same or very similar policies and processes for arranging off-site direction as they did for exclusion.

Of the minority that did have different policies or processes for off-site direction, the most common way it differed related to the type of behaviour exhibited by the pupil. For example, violent, unsafe or illegal behaviour was treated more seriously and so exclusion was seen as the only option. In lower-level cases, schools considered off-site direction as a way of preventing an exclusion in the longer term, by offering pupils a more suitable learning environment or a more engaging curriculum, which would in turn improve their behaviour.

*“In terms of the cohort that we have, they find academic work a lot more difficult than vocational work... giving them the chance to do a more vocational subject [like bricklaying, plastering, plumbing] will increase their chance of good behaviour in school. When we look at students who are not very confident academically their behaviour starts to change and they become less confident in what they can do. [We use this] for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion as well.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, North East**

For some schools, the main difference in the process for off-site direction compared to exclusion was how it was administered, with exclusion being a more formalised process, with more associated paperwork.

## Managed moves

Managed moves are agreements between schools, parents/ carers and a pupil, where that pupil moves to another school. The use of managed moves was far more common in secondary schools than primary schools: two-thirds of secondary schools had used this avenue in the last 12 months compared to less than one-fifth of primary schools. As with off-site direction, more schools in urban areas had used managed moves than

schools in rural locations. Academies were more likely to have used managed moves, and as mentioned previously, this is likely to be a result of agreements with other schools in their trusts.

Around half of schools that used managed moves did so because they felt it provided pupils with the chance of a 'fresh start', for example, when the school felt a pupil might be motivated to improve behaviour by having a 'clean slate'. Other scenarios where schools felt a managed move was appropriate were in cases of bullying or where the pupil had SEMH issues and would benefit from starting afresh in a new school.

Like off-site direction, some schools that used managed moves had done so as an attempt to avoid exclusion. Schools preferred to use managed moves rather than exclusions where possible, as they deemed this to have a less negative impact on pupils.

Managed moves were considered particularly suitable when the main issue was related to the pupil's relationship with their peer group.

*“Managed moves are used where behaviour is poor and a fresh start is possible. They are used to prevent permanent exclusions usually due to low level disruption where there is evidence that a change of friendship group or school would be beneficial...some pupils might feel they are typecast as troublemakers [so would benefit from a new environment].”*

**Headteacher, mainstream academy, secondary, Greater London**

## Accessing LA provision and support

Most schools had access to LA provision or support designed to help pupils at risk of exclusion remain in the school. The majority of these had used LA support in recent years, indeed over four-fifths of secondary schools had used LA support, compared to two-thirds of primary schools. This was somewhat more common among LA maintained schools, academies and free schools. It was slightly less common among special schools and independent schools.

The main forms of support that schools accessed through the LA were:

- **Temporary referral to AP as a fixed-term exclusion or off-site direction.** Usually, this was to a PRU for a fixed number of weeks (e.g. 6 or 12 weeks). This approach was used as an attempt to re-engage a pupil by moving them to a new environment, in the hope of avoiding a permanent exclusion.

- **Advice from behavioural support staff** in the LA. This was usually used to help identify the support a pupil at risk of exclusion would need. It was frequently used when a school was particularly concerned about a pupil, either because the pupil had specific needs (for example, autism), or when their normal interventions had not worked.

*“This would be when we are very concerned about a child and we feel that our strategies weren’t working and would benefit from a professional coming in and give us some new techniques. We also have training from the LA and found that they are very helpful.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, primary, South East**

The other reasons schools had used LA support included in relation to managed moves and the Fair Access Panel<sup>9</sup>, and use of SEND services and other support staff. These other uses were fragmented; only a minority of schools used each of these forms of support.

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<sup>9</sup> Fair Access Panels oversee a Local Authority’s Fair Access Protocol. These protocols exist to ensure children who do not have a place in school is offered one as quickly as possible, to make sure the amount of time spent outside of education is kept to a minimum. For more information, see: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/275580/fair\\_access\\_protocols\\_departmental\\_advice.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275580/fair_access_protocols_departmental_advice.pdf)

## Chapter 4: Referrals to alternative provision

This chapter explores the referrals process in more detail from a school, alternative provider, parent and pupil perspective. This includes referrals made for permanent and fixed-term exclusions as well as for other temporary placements to improve behaviour, and referrals to alternative provision made due to health needs. It first examines the circumstances when schools say they consider referring students to alternative provision, including the extent to which it is seen as a last resort, and the main reasons for referrals. It also explores why some schools had not made any recent referrals to AP. The chapter examines in detail aspects of AP referral and commissioning, including how schools quality assure alternative providers. It then explores experiences of the transition process from the provider, parent and pupil perspective.

### Chapter summary

The amount of time that schools spent managing pupil behaviour before referring them to AP varied hugely according to the pupil and the nature of the behaviour itself (for example, a severe one-off incident could lead to a quicker referral to AP). In line with the findings of the REA, the main reason why schools used AP was persistent disruptive behaviour. From the schools' perspective, this was overlain by concerns about pupil disengagement from learning, and – more broadly – the impacts of this on other pupils, and ultimately on school performance. This was a strong theme underlying schools' views. APs often highlighted that poor behaviour could be a sign of SEND, possibly unidentified at the point of referral.

Alternative providers considered that referrals worked best where full information about the circumstances of the referral were disclosed upfront; where they were able to get comprehensive information on the pupil's background and prior attainment; where any SEND were identified already, or early in the process; where there was a gradual or phased introduction to the AP setting; and where the pupil's parents/ carers and mainstream school remained closely involved. Many APs had pushed schools for fuller information about pupils and insisted that they remained on the school roll, where possible, to instil a greater sense of dual responsibility (the obvious exception being in cases of permanent exclusion).

Parents and pupils reported feelings of anxiety and stigma prior to starting in AP, particularly in cases of permanent exclusion. Parents generally felt they lacked information and support throughout the referrals process – a finding that echoes research discussed in the REA – and were particularly critical about lack of communication from the mainstream school. Parents interviewed in the case studies said they wanted more information about the referral process itself and what (if any) influence they could have in it, about the AP, about the reasons for referral, and about what the referral would mean in

terms of the implications for their child's education and future opportunities. Many parents and pupils interviewed in this research appreciated the opportunity to have taster visits and even a phased transition into AP and found that their experience of AP was often better than they initially expected.

## The use of Alternative Provision

Statutory guidance<sup>10</sup> on the use of AP states that local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for permanently excluded pupils, and for other pupils who – because of illness or other reasons – would not receive suitable education without such arrangements being made. Governing bodies of schools are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education from the sixth day of a fixed-term exclusion. Schools may also direct pupils off-site for education, if it is to help improve their behaviour. Statutory guidance sets out the expectations of local authorities and maintained schools who commission alternative provision and pupil referral units. Academies and free schools are not legally bound by the statutory guidance but the DfE expects them to use this as a guide to good practice.

The rest of this section explores schools' responses to questions about the circumstances in which they might consider the *option* of alternative provision in all its forms, followed by their reasons for actually making referrals (including in relation to decisions about making a permanent exclusion). The interviews covered school's decision-making processes and experiences at a general level rather than on a case-by-case basis.

### When is Alternative Provision considered?

Schools were asked about the range of circumstances in which they *considered* the option of alternative provision (note this differs from why they may have actually used it, which is discussed later in this chapter). It was common for schools to indicate that a child becoming disengaged with learning and their academic performance declining as a result would be a trigger for considering AP, and this was mentioned spontaneously by around half of secondary and all-through schools (who take pupils from age four to 18), and three in ten primary schools.

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<sup>10</sup> DfE (2016) Alternative Provision Statutory Guidance, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/268940/alternative\\_provision\\_statutory\\_guidance\\_pdf\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/268940/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_pdf_version.pdf)

*“We would consider AP when the child is making no progress within the school, and the tests indicate that there are no psychological or educational needs that are being a barrier to this. The child is disengaged...”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, London**

Lack of academic progress was rarely the only trigger; usually this was one of several elements that would raise concerns. Some schools, however, did acknowledge that pressures on academic outcomes made lack of academic progress an important factor in considering the use of AP for disengaged pupils, especially when they could disrupt the learning of other pupils in the school. This was a strong theme underlying schools' views and was more common among secondary schools.

This issue was discussed to some extent in the REA, and in the telephone interviews some schools were open about these pressures playing a role in considering the use of AP:

*“Ofsted judgements are influenced by the outcomes for pupils, so getting academic results up adds a lot of pressure on us and if I have a large number of pupils where the curriculum does not meet their needs that will affect my Progress 8 scores and the number of students who want to come here.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, West Midlands**

*“We are all in a chase for the best score, and this means we have to juggle the needs of students with the needs of the school”.*

**Deputy Headteacher, mainstream academy, secondary, South**

A concern that other students or staff might be at risk was another common reason given for considering alternative provision and was mentioned by around one-quarter of schools. Concerns would also be raised if a student was seen as having a detrimental impact on the learning of others in the classroom. Another reason for considering AP, cited by around one-fifth of schools, was when they felt unable to meet a child's SEND or medical needs. This was slightly more common among independent schools.

In some schools, alternative provision was used strategically to prevent permanent exclusions. This view was slightly more common among academies. Here schools felt they had exhausted all other options and AP was considered in order to avoid the child having a permanent exclusion on their record or to bridge the transition to the next stage of education, for example to college.

*“If the student was getting close to permanent exclusion, we would sometimes offer that [alternative provision] as an alternative to stop a permanent exclusion, particularly if they're in Year 10 or 11 because it's close to their GCSEs and to avoid them having a permanent exclusion on their record.”*

Around one in ten schools said they would consider AP when they believed a student needed a more vocational curriculum, which they were unable offer internally due to budget issues or other constraints such as lack of facilities. In these cases, they would consider a referral to AP instead. Note, referral to AP solely for this reason is illegal.

The majority of schools said parents were involved in the consideration of AP (although, as discussed later in this chapter, some of the parents interviewed in the case study research had a different viewpoint) and that in some cases the request for an alternative to the mainstream curriculum could come from parents.

### Is AP used proactively or as a last resort?

Schools that had made referrals to alternative provision in the last 12 months were asked specifically whether it was a last resort which they avoid using if at all possible, or something they actively look to use as the best way of supporting certain pupils.

Relatively few schools (around one in six) said they used it in a wholly proactive way.

Those who used AP in a proactive way commonly used other strategies to keep students engaged in mainstream school. These schools often suggested that permanent exclusions should be the last resort, and that AP could be used to prevent this, either to access specialist support not available in the school or to access a more vocational curriculum for those who struggled with academic learning.

In comparison just over half of secondary and two-thirds of primary schools used referral to AP a last resort.

*“We consider external AP as a last resort. It’s used when we have issues with their safety and the safety of other students around them, and can’t meet their needs in the mainstream system and they need specialist support. We used to use it when there were high levels of disengagement, for those who were not accessing the mainstream curriculum and when AP could offer them different types of education. The main question about whether to refer is, ‘is it the best thing for the pupil?’”*

Head of school, mainstream maintained, secondary, Yorkshire and the Humber

Often (for around three in ten schools) the use of AP was a grey area, and referral to AP depended on the situation and the individual pupil. For instance, some schools reported that AP was a way of helping pupils stay engaged in learning if they were in Years 8/9, whereas for those in Years 10/11 it was more of a last resort. Notably this difference between Years 8/9 and Years 10/11 also emerged from perspectives on whether AP was used as a short-term or long-term measure, with schools saying it tended to be short-term for Years 8/9, but long-term for Years 10/11.

A common reason for perceiving AP as a last resort was that in many cases it comes as an additional expense to the school.

*“Because of the budget it is now the last resort. In the past, it was used as a very positive educational tool or as a career link. But because of the cost it is the last resort.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, West Midlands**

Schools were also concerned that the pupil would lose their attachment to the school and that being removed from their peer group would have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing. Others considered AP a last resort because they had concerns about the quality or the range of the local provision, or simply felt that what was offered in mainstream school would always be of a higher quality.

*“[We consider AP a last resort] primarily because the type of AP that is available locally, in my view, is not serving the child's best educational interest.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, South West**

Conversely, those who used alternative provision more proactively felt it can be better suited to the pupil's style of learning or that it can offer a more personalised or tailored approach. It was also seen as offering a break from the mainstream environment, either on a part-time basis over a longer period of time, or on a full-time basis for a few weeks.

Schools were asked how the process for considering alternative provision differed from that for an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Responses to a large extent depended on how the school used AP. Schools who used AP for behavioural issues as well as SEND or medical conditions either said the two tend to go together, or that it would simply depend on the needs of the pupil. Other schools, more often secondary schools, said they only used alternative provision to address behavioural issues or educational needs, and would seek to support any SEND within the school (including considering eligibility for an EHCP).

## **Reasons for not having recently referred anyone to AP**

Among schools who had not referred anyone to alternative provision in the last 12 months, most said it had simply not been needed and this was particularly common among primary schools. Some said they prefer to handle issues internally, rather than involve external providers. As previously mentioned, there was also a sense among schools, particularly secondary schools, that the provision offered in mainstream school was superior and that AP should therefore be avoided as far as possible.

*“AP would simply not be considered because we feel that we do a better job.”*

**Headteacher, special maintained, all-through school, South West**

It was common among those who had not used alternative provision to say they had consistent approaches in place to manage behaviour, specifically to prevent the need for it. This was more common among secondary schools, who had often invested significant resource into ensuring their behavioural policies and practices were implemented consistently. The REA raised the importance of having a shared understanding between teachers in the same school about acceptable behaviour limits and the reasons for referral to AP, and this certainly seemed to be a feature of those schools who had not made any recent referrals. Their behaviour policies and strategies included offering alternative curricula, modelling positive behaviour, reward programmes, de-escalation techniques, mentoring and pupil code of conduct agreements.

A small number of primary and secondary schools indicated that they had not used AP over the last 12 months because of constraints including cost, a lack of availability within local provision, not knowing enough about what provision is available locally, and it not having been effective in the past.

## **Reasons for recent referrals to AP**

Schools that had made use of AP over the last 12 months were asked why. By far the most common reason for making recent referrals was persistent disruptive behaviour, mentioned by around four-fifths of secondary schools and two-thirds of primaries who had made referrals to AP over the last 12 months. This aligns with the findings of previous research, discussed in the REA. This was somewhat more common among mainstream academies and LA maintained schools, and less common among special schools. Around two-fifths mentioned mental health issues, including depression and self-harming. Following this a range of factors were identified including: pupils becoming disengaged and feeling they were not suited to mainstream education; one-off disruptive behaviour; and low attendance (though much less of an issue for primary schools). Around one in six mentioned violence or dangerous behaviour. One in twelve schools mentioned ADHD.

APs were also asked about reasons for referrals. They also listed disruptive behaviour and SEND as common reasons for their referrals, but put more emphasis on mental health compared with schools, and this was the case across all types of AP. Although disruptive behaviour was still the most common reason for referral, APs often pointed out that the disruptive behaviour in mainstream school tends to be a symptom of an underlying issue which needs addressing, which can be undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues, children in need of an EHCP who do not have one, underlying trauma, difficulties in the home etc.

Schools were mixed about the extent to which alternative provision was used as a short-term or long-term option. It was common for schools to say it depended on the needs of the student. A common reason for using alternative provision as a short-term option was

that is provides a break from the school environment, which can help the student get a 'new start' – a finding that was also highlighted by the REA. In most cases, the approach would depend on the individual or the specific situation. However, schools often said once a student was in Years 10/11, AP tended to be a long-term option due to the perceived difficulties of reintegrating a student close to their GCSE exams. Primary schools largely did not perceive AP as a long-term option but rather considered it a short-term option or said it was dependent on the needs of the individual child.

## The referrals process

### Who is involved?

The referral process varied from school to school and was to some extent determined by the commissioning model within the LA. Referrals to AP following a permanent exclusion from a maintained school would come directly from the LA, with limited involvement from the school other than to make the initial decision about permanent exclusion. In these instances, schools' referral processes were focused more on temporary placements for fixed-term exclusions, off-site direction, and managed moves.

The process for making referrals to AP typically included a range of staff within the school, with referrals happening after discussions between staff, SENCOs and the senior leadership team. Ultimately, the final decision about referral to AP would usually lie with the Headteacher, but often it was made in conjunction with the school's SENCO and/or the pastoral lead.

*"A group of people [looking at a situation] avoids a knee jerk reaction. We nearly always have some part-time AP first because it is a cheaper option...APs only get involved when we call them; this is the child, these are their needs, can you help them? Most of them interview the child first to say yes, we can manage them... or no we can't."*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, West Midlands**

It was common for schools to say the joint discussion among senior leadership would involve some sort of review of the evidence available to them with regards to behaviour, attendance and academic performance. Some also had a 'checklist' to ensure all other options had been pursued before considering AP. The contents of checklists varied from school to school, but the aim was typically to ensure the right stakeholders within the school and/ or the LA had been consulted, and that any relevant internal support that was available had already been tried, before a referral was considered.

*"I make the decision and gather all evidence with my leaders... we look at what steps and interventions have been put in place leading up to that point. Has there been a Personal*

*Support Plan in place? Has there been a referral to the educational psychologist? Has it been referred to the SEND team? If yes, then a decision for AP can be made.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, West Midlands**

It was also fairly common for schools to meet with parents and carers to discuss the transition. Some schools would also hold a meeting with the local authority or Behaviour Panel before the referral was made.

When making a referral, schools often said they tended to use a provider they have used in the past or are familiar with. It was also common to take a child-centred approach and choose the provider which was seen to fit with the child’s needs, but this was to a large extent dependent on the availability of AP in the local area, as well as cost per placement and the funding available.

## **AP commissioning and referral arrangements**

Findings from interviews and case studies with APs revealed a range of different referral and commissioning models, and these had implications for the way the AP received information about each referral and the process for inductions and assessments. These models and their implications will be discussed in more detail below but can be summarised as follows:

- Most referrals were funded through and come directly from mainstream schools. LAs were not directly involved unless in the case of permanent exclusion from a maintained school.
- All referrals come directly from mainstream schools. All placements in AP are funded through the local PRU, which will make decisions about what type of intervention is suitable.
- Referrals come both from LAs and schools. Typically, permanent exclusions will be referred through the LA while short-term placements are purchased directly by schools.
- All referrals come through the LA. Mainstream schools approach the LA, who will then decide on a suitable solution and contact the AP.

## **AP case study – referrals directly from schools**

All referrals to this independent AP (which was an out of school setting) came directly from mainstream secondary schools, with no involvement from the Local Authority. All pupils attended on a part-time basis and the AP offered extended work experience placements, approaching secondary schools directly to promote their programme. They had long-standing partnerships with several local schools and some of these will agree to a contract with the AP at the beginning of an academic year where they set out the number of placements they will purchase during the year.

Some referrals are planned, but the AP may also be called in at short notice when a child is at risk of exclusion and the school wants to put an alternative curriculum in place.

Typically, the pastoral team at a referring school will collate a list of pupils they think might benefit from a placement, either because they are at risk of exclusion, or due to issues related to low self-confidence or anxiety. The senior leadership team review and confirm which students to refer.

Pupils attend the AP on a part-time basis and remain dual-registered with their mainstream school, who retains responsibility for their academic progress.

The commissioning and referral model differed when a student had been referred for medical reasons. In these cases the referral model was typically described as more rigorous or standardised and always involved representatives of the LA. This often involved a panel consisting of the LA, the referring school, the AP, a medical consultant appointed by the LA, and the child's parents or carers. There were however examples of students enrolled in medical APs, for example a hospital school in a high-risk adolescent mental health ward, who had been permanently excluded on behavioural grounds rather than a referral being made based on the medical condition.

### **AP case study – medical referrals**

The hospital school is attended by patients at an adolescent mental health ward. Previously, Local Authorities funded beds directly and therefore had access to a certain number of placements. The funding model has since changed and all 12 beds are now funded directly, meaning referrals can come from any LA. Young people are referred by a consultant psychiatrist. The unit typically sees two types of admissions; emergency admissions (where a young person is transferred straight from hospital) and planned admissions. These present different challenges. While emergency admissions pose a challenge in terms of having to collect comprehensive information about the young person's medical and academic history over a very short period of time, planned admissions are often more complex and often result from a long-term condition. This means young people are more likely to have been out of school for an extended period, which creates difficulties in terms of designing a timetable.

Once the young person feels well enough to consider attending school, a bespoke timetable is put together, based partially on their academic history. The AP considered that mainstream schools are usually very good at getting them the information they need, but many young people have gaps in their learning which often also means they have missed tests or assessments at various points, and the information from schools is therefore often incomplete. In addition to gathering information about the pupil's education history they will baseline all pupils in English and Maths upon admission. They also work closely with the young person to find out what they are interested in, in order to create a timetable the young person feels they have ownership of. Once a timetable is agreed, each young person starts attending school on a daily basis, if they feel well enough to do to.

The referral process also differed when the AP offered outreach work. There were several examples of APs even making outreach work a pre-requisite for a referral, because it not only made any eventual referrals easier, because they knew the student, but also reduced the number of referrals coming through, as schools were better able to retain students. In some APs, schools were asked to complete detailed referral forms, outlining the student's background and reasons for support needed. The case would then be raised at a Fair Access Panel, usually consisting of the Headteacher of the AP, representatives from the LA and rotating Headteachers from mainstream schools during which a decision would be made about whether a full-time placement or outreach interventions would be most suitable. In other APs, there was a two-track system, one where concerns about a student were first raised and interventions were discussed, and another for permanent placements once other interventions had been tried.

## **AP case study – AP delivering outreach work**

This PRU had two channels of referrals; one for outreach work and another for placements.

To apply for outreach support a school completes a request form (available on the PRU website) detailing the student's background and reasons the support is required. A Fair Access Panel meets fortnightly to decide if support will be provided by the outreach service based on the actions already taken. If they agree to provide support, this consists of six weeks involvement from PRU outreach workers including meetings with parents, the head and key staff and observations of the child followed by a strategy and working with the child one-to-one and in class.

In order to apply for a long-term placement the mainstream school will complete the PRU's own detailed referral form. The school is expected to have tried numerous interventions before applying and must provide evidence of these. Having undergone the six-week outreach programme is a prerequisite for making a referral for a permanent placement. The PRU technically offers short-term and long-term placements, but due to an increase in permanent exclusions and long-term placements generally, they are currently not able to take any students for a short-term placement.

Because of the requirement of trying outreach work before making a permanent exclusion, the PRU is usually very familiar with the student, their history and needs before they receive them, which supports the transition into AP.

It was common for AP providers to have different referrals channels depending whether the referral was for a permanent exclusion or a short-term placement. While permanent exclusions typically came through the LA, short-term placements were often available for schools to purchase themselves. This could lead to difficulties for the AP, as the quality and quantity of information provided was different and the timelines differed greatly. While APs had a fair amount of control over short-term placements and could liaise directly with schools about information needs and induction processes, they had little control over permanent exclusions. Some described receiving a call from the LA notifying them that a student would start the following week, with little or no background information available about the student.

The split between permanent exclusions and short-term placements was also problematic for APs in terms of funding. Case study interviews revealed examples where there was little funding available for short-term placements, which were funded (unlike permanent exclusions) through schools rather than the LA. This had led to an increase in permanent exclusions, at the expense of short-term placements. In other cases, where

APs were oversubscribed, a decision had been made by the LA that they could only take referrals for permanent exclusions.

The APs in question were frustrated with this, as short-term placements were felt to be highly effective in reducing permanent exclusions (although this was based on perception rather than hard evidence). APs described the split between the two types of referrals as short-sighted and un-strategic as permanent exclusion would cost the LA more in the longer term.

It was common for APs to say placements fill up over the course of the academic year, especially if they offer short-term provision. This was often seen as a challenge as it led to uncertainty around funding and some APs felt it created an incentive for them to fill up places as soon as possible. Examples of this came from AP academies, PRUs and independent APs. Some APs said they resourced according to an expectation that places will fill up gradually over the course of the year. Others said they feel they are under pressure to fill up as soon as possible, especially if demand in the local area is high, which means they are unable to take new referrals later in the year. This caused frustration among some senior AP leaders, who felt the provision should be made available to those with a greater need for support, rather than those who happen to be referred earlier in the year.

APs participating in the case studies were asked whether they receive referrals that are not appropriate for the provision offered. In most cases, APs felt that mis-referrals were not a major problem. This was especially the case where the AP offered outreach work as a prerequisite for a referral, as they were able to signpost to more appropriate support earlier on in the process. Some APs, however, said they were in some cases forced to take students for whom the provision offered by the AP was not appropriate due to a lack of places in special schools. This was also spontaneously mentioned by some APs taking part in the telephone interviews. Examples included children who were on the autistic spectrum, and in some cases children with mental health conditions. This presented challenges for APs, who typically responded by bringing in more specialist staff to provide for these students as there were insufficient special school placements available.

*“It’s a challenge in terms of being able to provide their specific learning needs, because the staff that I employ here are not SEN specialists ... A lot of our students demonstrate the traits of behaviour of SEMH and attachment issues and that has a detrimental impact on those students’ abilities to cope with change, settling into a new school, dealing with new children, which happens all the time in a PRU. I attend the panel where students are placed, and we work closely with the SEN department in the council to support securing placements and arranging transitions, but if special schools are all full, we’re trying to persuade the council to put them into independent settings, which incur significantly greater costs, because there aren’t any maintained placements available.”*

**Head teacher, Pupil Referral Unit, South East**

Some senior leaders interviewed as part of the case studies, and the telephone interviews, had concerns about mixing these students with those who had been referred for behavioural problems. Others said it created challenges in terms of reintegration. The APs acknowledged that mainstream school was not the right option for these students, but because special schools remained oversubscribed they were likely to remain in AP for the rest of their time in school.

Although mis-referrals were not seen as a major problem, it was fairly common for APs to think the referrals they receive are too often skewed towards permanent exclusions, with not enough focus on shorter-term provision. APs would like to address this by offering more short-term provision (e.g. six, eight or 12-week programmes) which are seen to re-engage learners and provide them with useful self-management skills. Some also use part-time provision in this way, for example by having learners spend one day a week in AP, while the rest is spent in mainstream school.

Many APs participating in this research reported seeing an increase in referrals in recent years. One reason for this was felt to be that mainstream schools are increasingly less willing or able to adapt to student needs, and that their focus on attainment means they are more likely to refer students who are not performing academically to AP rather than offer support within the school. This was raised in both the telephone interviews and case studies and was mentioned by all AP types, although it was less commonly mentioned by Free Schools and FE Colleges, compared with PRUs, academies and independent APs.

*“Schools are becoming less inclusive due to league table pressures. They need to get results.”*

**Headteacher, AP academy, all-through, North West**

Some APs, particularly PRUs and independent APs, also suggested the focus on school performance, coupled with funding cuts meant schools were more likely to use permanent exclusions, which tended to be funded by the LA, rather than short-term provision, which they would have to pay for themselves.

*“I believe that it is down to funding... it is cheaper for schools to permanently exclude and rely on the Local Authority to pick up the funding rather than having to pay for interventions.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, secondary, West Midlands**

Other APs believed recent cuts in social services meant schools were facing challenges in terms of supporting young people with difficult social circumstances, and had less support available to them to keep those students engaged in education:

*“I think the changes to the curriculum have made it inaccessible to some young people in mainstream schools, they find it very difficult to manage and keep up academically. I*

*think some of the austerity measures have meant there aren't support services available to schools as readily as they used to be... so schools are trying to manage some very challenging social circumstances without any additional support or resources."*

**Headteacher, PRU, all-through, North West**

Some APs suggested one reason for the increase in referrals to AP was a greater appreciation among schools that APs could offer more specialised support. Others suggested criticism in recent years of unregistered APs had led to an increase in referrals among those who are registered and inspected by Ofsted.

*"It is twofold; on the positive side there is some understanding that we provide support that they can't, but negatively some schools use us to remove children from their roll to improve their performance data."*

**Headteacher, Further Education AP, South West**

*"Students were previously placed in unregistered Alternative Provision and locally there's been a lot of nervousness about this in schools, so we've seen an upsurge in our numbers."*

**Headteacher, Independent AP, secondary, South East**

Some APs also believed there had been an increase in the proportion of students who were being diagnosed as having complex needs. They suggested that this was partially due to a greater awareness of conditions such as autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). APs also acknowledged that schools do not usually have the funding or resources to offer the support needed for these students internally. In addition, it was felt that the current performance data does not allow schools to distinguish those students identified as needing additional support in their overall results.

*"There needs to be a way of schools being able to justify, recognise and evidence the support needed for those students who do not fit the 8-3 mainstream package and Progress 8 measures. More schools would do what's right for their students if those students didn't have such an impact on their performance measures."*

**Assistant Headteacher, PRU, secondary, East of England**

## **Schools' involvement in quality assurance**

Schools took a range of approaches to quality assuring the providers they use. These usually included a mix of:

- **Visits or meetings with providers** to check the quality of provision. These were usually carried out by the school's SENCO, Inclusion Officer or other senior leaders.

- **Meetings with the student** to ensure progress has been made. These usually happened at some point after the student had settled in, but not usually at an agreed frequency.
- **Regular reports** from the provider containing data on progress and attendance etc. The frequency with which these were received varied, but often it was by the end of each term.

Some LA maintained schools and academies mainly relied on the local authority providing quality assurance of its alternative providers, and schools would receive reports indicating which providers they could use. Others only used APs that were Ofsted-registered as an indicator of quality, reinforced by direct contact with or visit to the AP (see case study example).

### **AP case study – quality assurance – Assistant Headteacher, PRU, Secondary, East of England**

In one LA, the funding and commissioning of AP had been outsourced to the local PRU. As part of their remit, the PRU was responsible for quality assuring all other APs in the area. They used the same criteria as Ofsted when inspecting existing APs or adding new APs to their framework. APs who were unable to comply with the Ofsted inspection criteria were not included in the framework and would not receive referrals. A member of staff from the PRU would visit every AP in use once a week, and the Assistant Headteacher would visit once a term. All APs had to use the same progress report systems as the PRU, to ensure consistency. If a mainstream school in the area had an Ofsted inspection, the PRU would provide all the necessary information about students currently attending an AP, and the APs' inspection reports.

### **Information received at referral**

While APs mostly felt they get the information they need at referral, there were some clear challenges and many APs considered that they do not always get enough information. Some also described the process of getting the information as time consuming and labour intensive. Information came in a variety of formats:

- **APs' own referral forms:** It was fairly common for APs to have developed standardised referral forms. Some would simply not accept a referral unless these had been completed. The referrals forms had often been developed as a result of experiences of receiving poor or insufficient information from schools in the past.

The use of mandatory referral forms was often coupled with a mandatory face-to-face meeting between the AP and the referring school.

*“We have insisted on a comprehensive referral form and won't consider a student without one. So previously we would have schools and Local Authorities referring to us where for example there has been a knife crime incident but there was no risk assessment or record of the incident.”*

CEO, AP Academy, all-through, South

- **Behavioural reports provided by schools.**
- **Academic progress reports provided by schools.**
- **Information provided by parents/carers**, often through meetings or telephone calls during the transition process. If the mainstream school had collected information from parents or carers this might also be passed to the AP upon referral.
- **Risk assessments provided by schools or by social services.**
- **Medical reports provided by medical consultants.**
- **Information provided by other agencies** involved, for example social services.
- **EHCPs provided by schools.**

It was common for APs to request more detailed information about behavioural history and what approaches have been taken to manage it, for example triggers for challenging behaviour. In the case studies, APs explained that they would typically spend a lot of time at the beginning of a placement getting to know the student, their needs and what triggers their behaviour. This often involved a fair bit of 'trial and error' to understand the best way of supporting the student. Having this information at an earlier stage of referral was felt to save valuable time which would be better spent addressing gaps in learning.

Some APs also said they wanted this information in order to better understand whether schools had made a sufficient effort to keep the student in mainstream education. There was a suspicion among some APs that schools sometimes did not do enough to support a student, and too quickly made a referral to AP. Among some of the APs who had developed their own referral forms, this was partially to address this issue. The referral forms would collect information about what interventions had been tried before a referral was made and push back if they felt the school had not done enough to keep the student in mainstream education.

APs also felt more information about the family dynamic and history would be valuable, as well as previous involvement with external agencies, such as social services. In some cases, the family dynamic played a crucial role in the child's behaviour, well-being and engagement with learning and having this information at an earlier stage was believed to allow the APs to put appropriate support in place from the beginning.

APs also wanted more information about previous attainment and attendance, as well as information about any special educational needs, formally identified or not.

While the lack of information provided by schools was most commonly seen as a result of a paucity of documentation or monitoring, some APs also cited examples where they felt schools deliberately withheld information. This was particularly the case if there had been incidents of violent behaviour. APs reported that schools sometimes fear APs will not take a student if they are made aware of the extent of the problem and therefore withhold the information during the referral process. APs mentioned examples of receiving students who were known to have carried knives to school in the past, but this information was not passed on to the AP. This not only potentially put staff and students in the AP at risk but also meant they were unable to put appropriate provision in place at an early stage. One AP was trying to address this by asking the LA to introduce a system whereby the mainstream school is responsible for the child until they are placed in an AP, as this would incentivise them to provide sufficient information to organise a placement.

*"I can understand why they do it though, as if they disclosed all the information about the students, most places wouldn't take them...but it puts us as a disadvantage as we don't know how to prepare".*

**Headteacher, Independent AP, South**

There were also examples of the LA not providing necessary child protection information upon a permanent exclusion and the AP finding out later that the child was listed on the risk register. Where APs had received students transitioning from another AP, the information received also tended to be quite poor.

Some APs provided outreach services to local schools and these tended to be more positive about the referral process in terms of information provision. It was rare for these APs to receive students that were not already familiar to them through their outreach work, and this meant that staff already knew a great deal about the student and their background and that there was an existing relationship to build on.

*“It’s very unusual that we get a student that we haven’t worked with before, that we don’t know already.”*

Assistant Headteacher, PRU, secondary, East of England

## Assessments carried out on referral

In addition to information provided by schools, most APs carried out their own assessments when the young person arrived. This was used to put together an individualised plan for each student. Assessments conducted at the start of a placement typically included:

- **Diagnostic tests of needs**, often carried out with the support of SENCOs, behavioural specialists or using standardised assessment tools. These sometimes triggered the application for an Education, Health and Care Plan and to a large extent informed the individualised learning plan.
- **Baseline assessments of academic levels**: APs often regarded academic reports provided by mainstream school as inaccurate or out of date and APs therefore carried out their own. It was also common for students to have missed large parts of learning before the referral, sometimes including important testing points.

It was also fairly common for assessments to include:

- **Mapping of softer skills**, such as self-esteem, attitude to school, communication and social skills.
- **An assessment of the student’s family history**, including their living situation and other close relationships. A home visit was often an important part of this.
- **An assessment of levels of deprivation**, typically using a broader definition than Pupil Premium (which uses Free School Meals eligibility).

Assessments often revealed that the student has missed out on significant amounts of learning when they arrive at an AP, and this was seen to create challenges for teaching staff, as it created a need to ‘hit the ground running’ in order to catch up and get the student back on track in terms of progress. This was especially challenging with referrals made in Year 10 and 11.

While it was common for APs to carry out these assessments as soon as possible once a student starts, others preferred to wait, feeling the assessments could be off-putting for students, especially those with a more negative experience of mainstream school. They

therefore allowed a few weeks, in some cases up to six, to allow the student to settle in, and, importantly, to build trust with the staff before assessments were introduced.

## Provision of information to support effective reintegration

APs provided schools with extensive information to support effective reintegration. There was a keenness to share any information that would be useful to the school, and many APs reported that they provided the school with all the information they had on the pupil.

*“We give them any information that we’ve been able to generate when that young person has been here.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, secondary, North West**

However, by contrast, one AP stated being cautious about the amount of behavioural information they provided to schools, as they thought this could cause the school to reverse the decision to take the pupil. Another AP said that parents or pupils may not consent to certain information being shared, which the AP must respect under legal guidelines and their institutional policies.

It was common for APs to provide the school with a report detailing various aspects of the pupil’s time in AP. These reports included information and recommendations on how best to manage pupils going forward, both in an academic and pastoral sense.

*“We provide a detailed report of the child and their progress, for example, how we have managed to change their behaviour, or we have managed to support their learning. We make use of an electronic system which records every single thing that has ever happened to any child at this school which is fed back to the school or college.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, secondary, North West**

In some instances, APs would fill out a referral form prior to reintegration, which would include similar information to a report. The referral form would precede a meeting to decide whether the reintegration would happen.

Schools mentioned having plentiful and accurate information on the pupil as being important to ensuring a smooth transition back into mainstream provision. These schools often stressed that receiving this information was dependent on having an open and honest relationship with the AP.

The main information provided by APs on reintegrating pupils back into mainstream schools was:

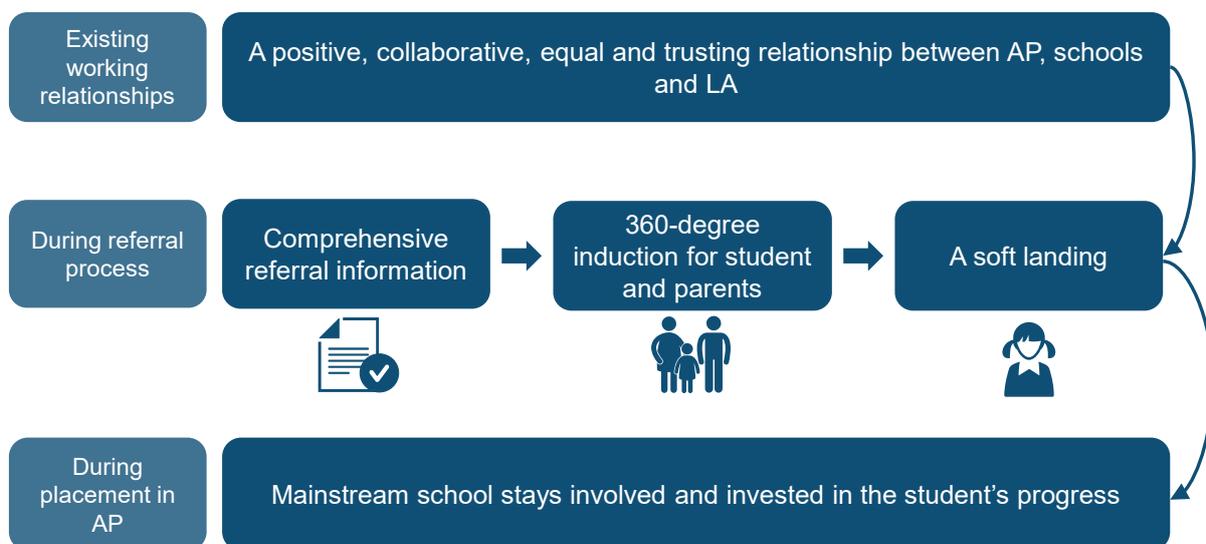
- Academic progress (including assessments and any qualification obtained);

- Behavioural information (including triggers for poor behaviour, successful approaches to behavioural management and conflict resolution);
- Attendance information;
- Identified learning needs and successful learning styles;
- Information on physical and mental wellbeing (including psychology reports and relevant medical information);
- Safeguarding information; and
- Personal information (e.g. on pupil's home life, interests, likes and dislikes).

## Ensuring a smooth transition

Interviews and case study visits to APs revealed a range of practices that aided a smooth transition into the AP, many of which are highlighted in relation to Question 5 of the REA. These are summarised in Figure 4.1 and discussed in the following section.

**Figure 4.1 What ensures a smooth transition to AP**



### A positive relationship with the LA and mainstream schools

APs' views of the referral and transition process to a large extent depended on their relationship with local schools and even more importantly with the LA. The APs that felt they had a positive relationship with mainstream schools and with the LA typically reported fewer challenges and described a smoother transition process.

There were several indicators of a positive relationship between APs, schools and LAs:

- The relationship being genuinely **collaborative**, where APs felt they had an open dialogue with the LA and mainstream schools about how to best support students.
- The relationship being **open and trusting** with APs receiving extensive and accurate information from the LA and mainstream schools and few concerns about information being withheld.
- The relationship being **'equal'**. Where APs described a less positive relationship, this was often partially caused by a perception that AP was seen as a 'lesser option'.

*"We need to change the view that AP is a lesser option. We work really hard to make sure everything we offer has a benefit to the students and that needs to be recognised. Schools in this area do not see us as AP, they see us as a school. But that view needs to be spread."*

**Assistant Headteacher, PRU, secondary, East of England**

APs who described a less positive relationship with the LA, and/or with local schools, often experienced a lack of transparency and dialogue with the LA. Examples of this included:

- The LA not informing an AP that they were planning to reduce the number of referrals due to funding cuts, leading the AP to resource the academic year based on an expectation of being at capacity, when in reality they received only half the expected numbers.
- LAs or schools not providing sufficient information or withholding important information upon referral.
- LAs not being open to discussing referrals with the AP but pushing ahead despite the AP's recommendation of another solution.

## **A 360-degree induction process**

APs generally provided a fairly structured induction process incorporating everyone involved in supporting that pupil – school, parents and AP staff - and this was felt to be important to ensure a smooth transition. This induction would usually include:

- Meetings with parents and students together before the start of the placement. These meetings would be used to alleviate concerns and offer reassurances and to discuss what support and academic provision might be suitable. These were also used to explain what expectations the AP has in terms of behaviour.

Students were often given the opportunity to meet teachers in an informal way and to observe other students in the AP.

- Visits and taster sessions at the beginning of a placement for parents and young people to become familiar with the environment.
- Involvement from the referring school to continuously receive information to help design an appropriate learning package and to help ease the transition period for the pupil. This allowed APs to prepare and put appropriate support in place before the young person arrived and to 'hit the ground running'. This was seen to be particularly important if the young person had identified gaps in their learning or significant absences.

Involving parents/carers in the induction process was also seen to help ensure parental engagement throughout the placement, which in turn was considered crucial to the student's attendance.

## A 'soft landing'

Several APs offered students what they described as a 'soft landing' into the AP setting, as they recognised that for most students the transition could be difficult and emotional. To achieve this, it was fairly common to offer 'taster sessions' to new students, to help them settle in. In these cases, the student might visit the AP for a few hours to sit in on a small number of lessons. They would also be allowed to sample different courses to decide what they wanted to study once their placement starts. When students started their placement at the beginning of the academic year, APs said they often offered taster sessions or visits during the summer break as otherwise some students would become nervous and worried over the holiday.

Some also took a 'phased approach', whereby the student would start by attending only for a short period of time per week and gradually build up to full-time provision. This process could take several weeks.

APs also felt it was crucial to take the time to build a positive relationship during this period, although this was often described as difficult and time consuming. Staff said it was important that the student feels involved and knows what is happening and what autonomy they have in the process.

*"The kids can be very defensive at first, it's hard to convey you're on their side... We have to speak calmly, let them talk about their issues, talk it over with them. They can be easily triggered into old behaviours. We're here to help and guide them, to help them develop their coping mechanisms."*

Teacher, AP Free School, South

## Keeping the mainstream school involved

APs, especially those participating in the case studies, believed that students are more likely to achieve a positive outcome if their mainstream school remains involved and invested in the progress they make and shares responsibility for the young person with the AP. There were no significant differences by provider type, and involvement by the mainstream school was felt to be beneficial to students in both short-term and long-term placements. They generally had a strong preference for all students to remain enrolled at their mainstream school. They were also reluctant to let the mainstream school fully lose touch with the student, partially because they felt this incentivised schools to refer students who may not be performing academically, in order to improve their progress measures. Some AP PRUs and academies had even made dual enrolment a requirement of a referral and felt this benefitted both the transition process, as well as reintegration or post-16 transitions.

APs also felt having dual responsibility for a student created a more equal working relationship between them and mainstream schools. Dual enrolment was also believed to benefit the students as they did not have to experience feeling of being rejected by their school. APs were also conscious that graduating from an AP can still have a negative social stigma, and that staying on roll of the mainstream school therefore provided the young person with a broader range of options for the future.

## Parents' experiences of referral processes

Most schools said they involved parents at the start of the referral process, from when a referral was first considered. It was rare for schools to say parents were not involved and this only happened in special circumstances, for example when there was a fear of violence in the home.

This finding was not supported by the parent interviews carried out as part of the case studies. For most of the parents interviewed in the case studies, across a range of APs and types of referral, the transition to AP had been a difficult, frustrating and emotional experience.

*“You are essentially grieving for the child you had but who you don’t have anymore. I had expectations of my child doing her GCSEs and having a bright future. I have had to set those expectations aside.”*

**Parent of girl in Year 11, Hospital School, South**

Parents for the most part described a negative experience of mainstream school, often beginning for their child with the transition from primary to secondary school. This is highlighted as a key area of concern in the REA. Parents reported there was often a

decrease in support and flexibility offered by secondary schools compared with primary schools, coupled with an increased focus on attainment, which led to a decline in academic performance, which in turn led to feelings of low self-esteem. This was seen to trigger behavioural problems and low attendance. Among parents of children attending hospital schools due to a mental health condition the increased focus on attainment and decrease in flexibility and support offered at secondary level was also thought to have led to a worsening of symptoms and in some cases, behaviour. It was common for parents to feel their children had needs which were not acknowledged or dealt with in school, and that instead the child was dealt with simply on behavioural grounds. Parents described a lack of understanding, knowledge and awareness among some teachers of issues such as mental health, ASD and ADHD.

*“He has a disability but was treated as simply a naughty boy.”*

**Mother of boy in Year 10, AP Academy, South**

Findings from school interviews showed that it was fairly common for schools to use internal inclusion units in order to avoid making a referral to AP. Parent interviews revealed examples of mainstream schools trying to offer alternatives internally, but in some cases parents considered the support to be inappropriate to the needs of their child. Parents mentioned examples of disciplinary action being taken to deal with behaviour caused by mental health or learning difficulties, which they felt was inappropriate and sometimes made the situation worse. Examples included keeping students with formally identified learning difficulties or mental health problems in isolation inappropriately. These parents felt adaptations to teaching and learning could have been made to keep their children engaged in mainstream education, but instead they were removed from the classroom and subsequently fell behind on their learning.

*“It was meant to be alternative provision, offered within the school. In reality it was just a room to keep them in.”*

**Mother of boy in Year 11, AP Academy, South**

For the parents interviewed in the case studies, the lack of understanding by mainstream teachers of mental health conditions was particularly distressing. Examples included a boy with a diagnosed mental health condition, for which he was attending a CAMHS unit once a week, being regularly excluded from school on behavioural grounds until he was permanently excluded and started at an AP. The mother felt her son was impacted negatively by the punishments given by the school, and that by the time he arrived in the AP *‘it was in some ways too late for him’*.

Most parents interviewed in the case studies described receiving very little information about the decision to make a referral. This was the case among parents of children who had been permanently excluded and among those whose children were referred to AP

for fixed-term exclusions or off-site direction on behavioural grounds. They did not know what powers/ responsibilities the school had and what the process should be in terms of their own rights as parents, and as a result the process often felt beyond their influence, intimidating and sometimes appeared very sudden. It should be noted that some of these families lived in rural areas where there may be a limited number of AP providers available for schools to refer to. Parents of children who were referred to medical AP or designated hospital schools as a result of diagnosed medical needs had more information about the process.

*“We had no choice. It was all a shock and a panic.”*

**Carer of girl in Year 5, PRU, North**

For parents of students in Year 11 the transition was seen as especially negative due to the impact on GCSE results:

*“It was imposed, without my consent...He’s in his GCSE year, he needed to be at school.”*

**Parent of boy in Year 11, Independent AP, North**

There were examples of parents being given an (unlawful) choice between a transition to AP or home education. This included parents of children with learning difficulties, autism, ADHD and mental health difficulties. In other cases, parents were simply informed that arrangements had been made for their child to start at an AP. In one example, a mother of a girl with autism received a phone call from the mainstream school informing her that her daughter had been put on a fixed-term exclusion and would be starting at an AP the following Monday. While this is in line with the guidance on timeframes required by the statutory guidance, she was not given any further information about the referral or the AP and had to find out the location herself.

Some of the parents interviewed in the case studies described how their children had missed out on significant parts of education by not attending school or due to multiple short fixed-term exclusions (where there is no statutory requirement for AP to be put in place) and how this had a negative impact not only on their academic progress but also on their behaviour. Parents felt that being out of school or AP made the young people more susceptible to negative influences because they were more likely to be mixing with other young people who were not in education. In some cases, young people had been out of education for a long period while the mainstream school found a placement in AP. There were a few examples of young people being educated by parents at home as a stop-gap measure while a placement was found, but during this period the parents received no support from the school.

Except in the cases of medical AP and hospital schools, parents generally knew little about the AP in advance, and the information they were given came from the AP itself, usually through visits and tasters, rather than through the school. Prior to this, most were apprehensive or anxious about the AP and how their child would find it, due to the stigma attached to referral.

*“The mainstream school told me they were sending him to naughty school. That’s what they called it. I thought, once he gets sent there, that’s the end for him.”*

**Parent of boy in Year 11, AP Academy, South**

After visits and taster sessions parents were more positive about AP. Depending on the child’s age/ year group, parents were not overly concerned about the academic provision at this point, as their priority was their child’s wellbeing. The main exception, as discussed earlier, was parents of children who were referred to AP in Year 10 or 11, where there was more concern about the impact on their GCSEs. Parents were very positive about smaller class sizes and more tailored provision, and this usually convinced them that the move was right for their child.

*“I felt good knowing that the year group only had 60 students, knowing that they wanted to get the best results for my child and not the targets for the school...she’d be more of a person and less of a number.”*

**Parent, FE College, North**

Parents were generally positive about the induction processes offered by the AP. It was felt that the APs allowed for a gradual induction and time to build trust and for the young person to settle in.

*“[They] helped her ease back in [to education] .... She wasn’t chucked straight into the classroom.”*

**Parent of girl in Year 10, PRU, North**

Parents of pupils in APs with an outreach programme were even more positive and felt this had made the transition into a full-time placement easier, as they and their child had an existing relationship with the staff there.

In a few cases, parents were more actively involved, having found out about the AP independently and pushed to have their child referred. There were several examples of this, for example a mother who had pushed for her autistic son to be referred to an AP free school, and among parents of students in a hospital school for adolescent mental health conditions. These parents described a long and difficult process of trying to have their child’s condition recognised and for the child to be treated as someone who has an illness, rather than purely a behavioural issue. Where the parent initiated the referral, the

process often took longer than if it was initiated by the school, and parents found it difficult to navigate.

*“I had to push and organise everything . . . there was no pathway, no provision.”*

Parent of girl in Year 10, Medical PRU

## The pupil perspective on referral to AP

Similarly to parents and carers, the young people interviewed as part of the case studies were negative about their experience of mainstream school. There were no detected differences by types of AP or by student characteristics. It was common for pupils to describe their experience of mainstream school as overwhelming, and class/ school size was an important element of this. Many said they struggled in class sizes of 30 plus; that they were easily distracted by their peers and found it difficult to learn. This led to feelings of low self-esteem and aggression. One Year 11 girl attending a PRU described feeling like ‘a failure’ all through mainstream school.

Students with diagnosed mental health conditions were particularly negative about their mainstream school experience and felt teachers and other staff did not understand how best to deal with them. For this reason, they had been relieved to leave the school. There were also examples of pupils who had experienced bullying, and for this reason were happy to have left. On the other hand, some pupils reflected that it was difficult to leave their friends in mainstream school and that the AP was further away from home and therefore distanced them from their social circle.

While most of the pupils interviewed had come to the AP directly from a mainstream school, a few had experience of ‘managed moves’ between schools, or had been to other APs previously. This was described as a negative experience of being repeatedly uprooted and moved around, and often meant that settling into their current AP took a while. Pupils had moved schools multiple times for various reasons, mainly due to the end of a fixed-term placement, or because their initial move had not worked out due to disengagement or repeat poor behaviour. Young people described feeling anxious about their referral to AP, which was caused by expectations of it being a chaotic, disruptive environment, with perceptions that there would be shouting, aggression and even violence. It was uncommon for young people to have any choice in the transition and only a few received advance information about the AP they were starting at:

*“At first it felt horrible [not having a choice], I would have said ‘no’. I would have preferred to be at school full-time. I knew nothing about it [AP], I had never heard of it . . .”*

Year 11 pupil, independent AP

*“I thought it was a ‘bad’ place, where they put bad kids and there would be fighting the whole time – there still is quite a lot of fighting... but everyone’s happy, everyone gets on with the teachers...”*

**Year 11 pupil, AP free school, Midlands**

Induction meetings with the AP headteacher and other staff often helped overcome concerns. Some said that induction meetings made them feel like they were being listened to and that they had some control over what would happen to them.

Some students who were referred due to a mental health diagnosis found it more difficult to settle in at first as they were mixed with students referred for behavioural problems. This tended to be the case in larger AP providers, who receive a mix of student types, for examples PRUs and AP academies. These students often said it would have been easier for them at the beginning to be with students with similar problems. Staff in these APs however often argued that mixing students with different needs and backgrounds was helpful and that it encouraged them to regulate their behaviour.

While the cohort of pupils in AP who were interviewed commonly admitted to nervousness about moving into AP, almost unanimously they reported enjoying the education there. This is discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5: Delivering alternative provision

This chapter examines delivering provision within AP settings. It explores the nature of provision, the different types of curriculum and qualifications offered, and the basis on which AP leaders decide on their offer. It also investigates the different approaches to teaching and learning employed, and how student progress is monitored and shared amongst referring schools and parents. Finally, this chapter reviews the student experience of study within alternative provision, and issues relating to staff recruitment, retention and career development.

### Chapter summary

AP is a hugely diverse sector offering varying types of placement, to pupils who come for a wide range of different reasons, spanning permanent exclusion on behavioural grounds through to complex SEMH needs. Existing attainment levels of pupils vary considerably on arrival in AP. This creates a particular challenge for APs in terms of the range and nature of the provision they offer. The majority reported offering GCSE Mathematics and English alongside other qualifications such as Functional Skills, arts-based provision, vocational subjects, and a narrow range of additional GCSE subjects. APs offering short-term or part-time placements favoured shorter, more unit-based qualifications such as AQA and NCFE unit awards.

APs most commonly employed general approaches such as a smaller class sizes, and personalised or one-to-one tuition, rather than pedagogical approaches designed specifically for a particular student group (e.g. pupils with SEMH and/or with a history of violent behaviour). Small class size was seen as fundamental to effective teaching in AP, and were singled out by the pupils interviewed in the case studies as being an important difference to their mainstream school. Many of these pupils preferred the AP compared to their mainstream school, especially if they had been referred for SEMH reasons.

Pupil progress was closely monitored in AP, and regularly reported to parents, sometimes via daily updates. Monitoring encompassed attendance, behaviour and attainment, as well as emotional wellbeing and softer outcomes. Parents interviewed in the case study research appreciated the frequent updates they received on their children's progress and welcomed the emphasis on more 'positive' communication, rather than the communication they described in mainstream schooling which focused on problems with their child's behaviour.

Teacher recruitment was a more pressing concern for APs than retention, with four in ten experiencing recruitment difficulties compared with one in ten experiencing difficulties retaining staff once appointed. The main issue was not a lack of applicants but the challenge of finding someone suitable for the job.

## The nature of provision

Alternative providers were asked about their offer, both in terms of the length of the average length of stay for pupils, and the nature of their placement (i.e. full-time or part-time). Just over a half of the APs interviewed delivered only full-time provision, around two in ten delivered only part-time provision, and three in ten offered a mix. The majority of APs which offered only part-time provision were not registered with Ofsted and tended to receive most referrals from other alternative providers, in contrast to those offering full-time provision. APs with only part-time provision were often small in size, most commonly offering placements for 20 or fewer students.

APs offered a variety of different lengths of placement depending on the individual students' needs and their reasons for entering AP, with short-term and long-term placements frequently occurring within the same institution. A minority of APs had very short average placements, with only six of the 200 AP leaders interviewed stating that the average duration was under one month. Across all AP types, the reported average placement was a minimum of six months, with some lasting longer than a year. For students entering AP at Key Stage 4, the move in most cases was permanent until they completed their qualifications at 16.

Amongst our sample, PRUs were most likely to only offer short-term placements (three in ten), in comparison to around one in four AP academies and just over one in ten independent APs. It was most common however for all AP types to offer a mix of both short and long-term provision.

Both school and AP leaders indicated that student placements within AP settings were often extended beyond the initial agreement. The main reasons for this were:

- APs can often be involved in helping a pupil to apply for an Education, Health and Care plan. In practice this can be a lengthy process, and sometimes results in students staying at an AP longer than initially expected.
- For students who join an AP in Key Stage 4 and are already studying for qualifications, it was often argued by both school and AP leaders that returning to mainstream schooling during this period would be disruptive to attainment. Therefore, many Key Stage 4 students who entered AP did not return to their mainstream school, even in cases where this was not the original plan.
- Students become settled in the AP setting and, along with their parents, do not wish to return to mainstream schooling where they were struggling previously.

*“The pupil and the family didn't feel that the reintegration worked. The pupil became very anxious, she'd been in a setting that was much smaller, less spread out and had a different ratio of staff to child. She was more settled in the AP.”*

SEND Lead, mainstream maintained, secondary, North East

## The curriculum in AP

DfE's Statutory Guidance for local authorities<sup>11</sup> indicates that, although good alternative provision will differ from pupil to pupil, there are common elements that alternative provision should aim to achieve, including:

- Good academic attainment on par with mainstream schools, particularly in English, mathematics and science (including IT), and with appropriate accreditation and qualifications;
- That the specific personal, social and academic needs of pupils are properly identified and met in order to help them to overcome any barriers to attainment;
- Improved pupil motivation and self-confidence, attendance and engagement with education; and
- Clearly defined objectives, including the next steps following the placement such as reintegration into mainstream education, or successful transition to further education, training or employment.

AP leaders were asked what types of learning and other wider activities they offered. The majority provided learning in a classroom-based format, following a subject-specific curriculum. Both Mathematics and English were offered by more than four in five AP institutions. The APs interviewed who were not offering any Mathematics and English in their curriculum were either solely part-time provision, or a mix of full and part-time, and predominantly independent APs or CAMHS services offering part-time AP support to pupils who were still attending mainstream school.

The rest of provision spanned a variety of subject areas including ICT, PSHE, Citizenship, arts-based activities such as music and drama, and sports or outdoor activities. The types of subject offered did not tend to differ substantially between AP types, although it is worth noting that arts-based activities were provided by all AP free schools involved in this research, and sports or outdoor activities were provided by all but one of the AP academies interviewed.

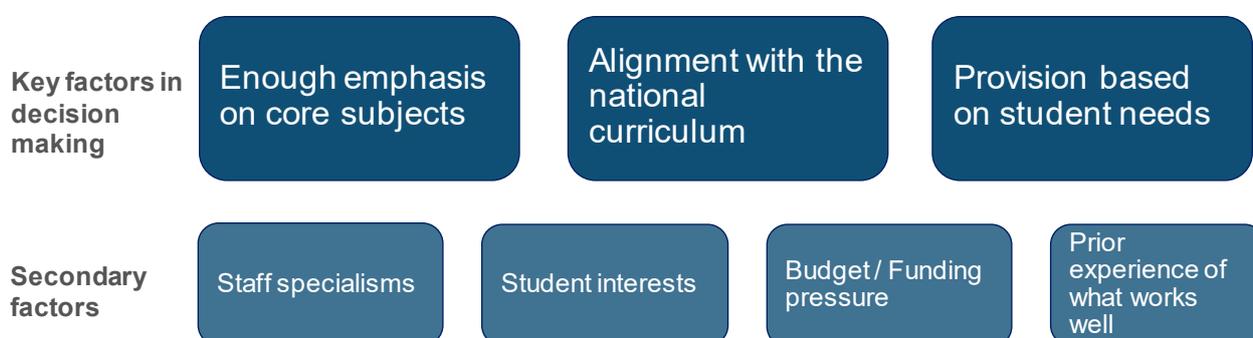
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<sup>11</sup> DfE (2016) Alternative Provision Statutory Guidance, section 30  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/268940/alternative\\_provision\\_statutory\\_guidance\\_pdf\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/268940/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_pdf_version.pdf)

Work-based learning or placements were offered by the majority of APs, and even more frequently by FE colleges and AP free schools, with a small number of institutions also providing classes in ‘life’ and ‘social’ skills such as communication, team-working, etc.

Decisions on the subject mix were influenced by a mixture of factors: wanting to ensure that the curriculum stayed as close as possible to the national curriculum in mainstream schools, including suitable provision in English and Mathematics, whilst also ensuring there was also broader provision, such as vocational subjects, which catered for a wider range of student interests and ways of learning. It is worth noting that, as already discussed, alternative providers are typically required as part of the commissioning process to provide English, Mathematics and science (including IT).

**Figure 5.1 Key factors in decision making around curriculum offer**



## Alignment with the national curriculum

While statutory guidance states that good alternative provision should enable pupils to achieve ‘good educational attainment on a par with their mainstream peers’<sup>12</sup>, it does not go so far as to require APs to adhere to the national curriculum. It was common, although not universal, among all AP types to seek to deliver a curriculum for students that as ‘closely as possible’ mirrored the content and learning techniques employed in mainstream education, in order to support reintegration. APs who mentioned this felt that reintegration would only be successful if the level of academic work in AP did not differ significantly from the level expected in mainstream schooling.

*“The curriculum for Primary pupils has to be the same as Mainstream so that they can slot back in easily...and for the Year 6 it is trying to get them ready for Secondary so they need to be experiencing the same curriculum...For Key Stage 3 it also needs to be set up*

<sup>12</sup> DfE (2016) Alternative Provision Statutory Guidance, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/268940/alternative\\_provision\\_statutory\\_guidance\\_pdf\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/268940/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_pdf_version.pdf)

*for them to slot back into Mainstream so a full curriculum is offered,...Key Stage 4 is also a full curriculum.”*

**Headteacher, AP academy, all-through, South West**

AP leaders added that in addition to ensuring that the ‘gap’ in academic rigour between AP and mainstream school does not become too large as to hamper reintegration, an academic curriculum also helped to dispel preconceptions that students and parents had about APs. As noted in Chapter 4, parents often had quite negative preconceptions of the quality of education delivered by alternative providers. By offering a curriculum and teaching approach that broadly mirrored what parents would expect of a mainstream school, albeit with an often narrower range of subjects, AP leaders felt they were better placed to engage parents in their child’s education. It was also important for AP staff that their pupils were aware they would not have an ‘easier’ workload than they had in mainstream schooling.

In case study visits there were a number examples of AP settings taking specific measures to ensure that students were able to keep up a curriculum that mirrored that of mainstream education. The example below illustrates this.

#### **AP case study – Keeping up with mainstream curriculum in an AP setting**

This Secondary PRU for Key stage 4 learners offers a mixture of academic and vocational learning for its pupils, allowing them to follow an option of two distinct pathways that mirror a truncated mainstream curriculum depending upon their interests and academic ability. One pathway encompasses taking six GCSEs, including Maths and English, whilst the other involves three GCSE qualifications (again including Maths and English) with one City & Guilds vocational qualification.

In order to facilitate pupil progress throughout these pathways, the headteacher focuses on running the AP in a similar way to a mainstream school. As a Key Stage 4 centre, the vast majority of students stay at the AP up to the point they have completed their GCSEs and/or vocational qualifications.

To ensure that pupils remain on track, the timetable comprises five periods a day from Monday to Thursday, with Friday an enrichment day. Classes are primarily organised by age as in mainstream education, and academic attainment is tracked ‘from the day students’ arrive, via half termly assessments, which are benchmarked against baseline assessments of each student when they arrive in the AP setting.

The dual pathway approach, coupled with implementing a structure of assessment and lesson periods that mirror mainstream schooling, has been very successful for this AP setting, with 64% of their KS4 leavers entering further education or employment.

## Balancing core subjects with individual student needs and interests

DfE guidance on AP requires providers to seek to ensure pupils achieve good academic attainment on par with mainstream schools - particularly in English, Mathematics and science (including IT), with appropriate accreditation and qualification. It also requires them to seek to identify and meet pupils' personal, social and academic needs and support them with the self-confidence, attendance, and engagement with education. APs reported wanting to provide a balance between focusing on these core subject areas and offering provision that is more tailored to the needs of individual students. Several indicated that progress in core subjects was a requirement for KS3 and KS4 students to access non-academic areas of the curriculum (e.g. outdoor activities) that may be more in keeping with their personal interests.

*“We’re following directives in terms of teaching core subjects, and it’s the gateway to moving on, and the young people understand that. Then we mix it up a bit, working to people’s strengths and interests, and working to the staff’s strength as well.”*

**Teacher in charge, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary**

In some cases there was a tension between AP teaching staff and senior leadership when developing a curriculum. Some teaching staff wanted the curriculum to focus more on engaging students with subjects and teaching methods that are designed around their interests (e.g. more vocational subjects or subjects such as music production), whilst for AP headteachers the priority was to deliver quality provision in core subject areas and maintain a small pupil to teacher classroom ratio. Some AP headteachers considered that the further the curriculum moved towards catering for diverse student interests, the more need they would have to employ specialist staff, and trade this off with increasing the pupil to teacher ratio in core subjects. Some APs in case study visits stated that they were actively looking to employ staff who could teach in multiple subject areas including Mathematics and/or English, to enable a broader curriculum offer.

## Funding

A minority of APs also explained that the breadth of their curriculum offer was dependent on (and limited by) the level of funding they receive. This was especially the case amongst APs with a larger number of short-term placements where student numbers would fluctuate significantly throughout the year. Also, some APs with a high proportion of students with SEND who did not have EHCPs indicated that they could not deliver the wide curriculum offer that they would ideally like because resource was required to provide tailored individualised support to these pupils. In contrast, where EHCP funding

was available, this allowed them to focus on individualised support for students with the greatest needs whilst also maintaining a curriculum that broadly aligned with mainstream education for all students.

*“Funding also plays a part. We have great coaches who can make the dullest subject interesting. We have people of all ages with lots of life experience who think outside the box and are aspirational. We are small and flexible enough to support our learners in their direction, not ours. EHCP learners have a lot more funding so what we offer them is broader (in terms of personalised support), but the need is greater.”*

**Director, Independent AP, secondary, Midlands**

The impact of funding or budgetary restrictions were also commonly noted by APs in relation to having to limit off-site provision (e.g. fencing, canoeing, sailing that were delivered by external providers), and in limiting the number of specialised staff hired to support SEND students.

## **Qualifications offered**

AP leaders whose institutions had pupils at Key Stage 4 were asked what qualifications they offered, and why. The most common were GCSEs in Mathematics and English, mentioned by four in five APs. Three-quarters of APs catering for Key Stage 4 pupils also offered Functional Skills 1 and 2, just over half offered BTECs, one-third offered the AQA Unit Award Scheme and one-quarter offered ASDAN Units. In addition to qualifications, one in five offered the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme.

Independent APs were more likely to offer Functional Skills 1 and 2 instead of GCSE Mathematics and English qualifications, in contrast to other AP types, where GCSEs in Mathematics and English were the prevalent qualifications offered.

## **Decisions about what qualifications to offer in AP**

AP leaders indicated that decisions around what qualifications they offered were broadly based on whether the qualification was appropriate for post-16 pathways, and whether the level and content gave students the best chance of achieving a qualification whilst in the AP setting. For pupils who were only going to be in the AP setting for a short period of time, this would mean doing a unit-based qualification.

Ensuring a student left with a portable qualification was a key objective across all AP types. It was felt that before entering an AP setting, students in mainstream schooling may never have experienced achievement (academic or otherwise), and it was important to show them that could achieve and progress in a learning environment.

*“By offering these sort of (vocational) qualifications we are hoping to show students the importance of achieving and succeeding going forward. This is also to build their confidence.”*

**Executive Head, PRU, all-through, South East**

APs that delivered short-term placements also noted that their qualification offer was based on allowing the pupil to gain a meaningful record of attainment while they were at the AP, to bolster their confidence and provide evidence for mainstream schools, FE colleges, and employers, showing that the pupil can apply themselves to completing a course of work - even if this is only for several weeks. When it came to post-16 transitions, FE colleges preferred to see GCSE attainment (discussed in Chapter 7). APs which offered short-term placements tended to offer shorter and more unit-based qualifications. Examples of qualifications offered included the Arts award, unit-based qualifications e.g. ASDAN, individual units of BTEC qualifications, and Functional Skills. With short learning and assessment periods these qualifications were deemed to be most appropriate by APs who had multiple entry points for learners. Shorter unit-based qualifications such as ASDAN and the AQA awards scheme were thought to be valuable for pupils, and APs offering these felt they were particularly relevant to their student cohort as:

- **They require no examination as part of their assessment.** Many students struggled with the pressure of examinations, which caused high levels of emotional stress.
- **There are no limitations for how learning can be evidenced (AQA award scheme).** This allowed teaching staff to be creative in the assessment process, evidencing progress in a means that is most suitable for different student needs.
- **In short-term placements, unit-based qualifications give the opportunity for academic continuity,** such that a student can continue to build credits in their next place of learning.

Another main consideration in developing a qualification offer was putting students forward for qualifications that they could realistically achieve. Some AP staff and leaders reported that Functional Skills qualifications provide a strong alternative for GCSEs, as they allow students to take exams when they feel ready to, in comparison to a set date.

*“GCSE is a gold standard and should be there as an option wherever possible. Functional Skills is a good system, it's a ladder, stepping stones, taking qualifications at the right time, which builds self-esteem and self-confidence.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, all-through, East of England**

Several APs noted the need to offer a 'back up' qualification if a student was either academically unable to complete a GCSE, or if they felt the student could have a 'bad day' in a GCSE exam. A few APs offered entry-level qualifications concurrently with

GCSEs in case a student was unable to attend a GCSE examination, or performed poorly. Where APs had a high enrolment of students with SEND (anxiety or depression in particular), qualifications with fixed examination dates such as GCSEs were not always appropriate.

Whilst, shorter, unit-based qualifications are not favoured by post-16 institutions in relation to evidence for transition (in comparison with GCSE qualifications), the purpose of these qualifications for APs was to offer students a chance to gain confidence in an educational programme of learning, have 'something to show' during a short placement in AP and offer a qualification that was more relevant both to the level of learning and the academic/vocational interest of the student.

## GCSEs

The most common GCSEs on offer were Mathematics and English (four in five APs who catered for Key Stage 4 pupils offered these, often in parallel with Functional Skills). Just over half of APs catering for Key Stage 4 pupils offered a Science GCSE, whilst only around one in ten offered a GCSE in History, and around one in twenty offered GCSEs in Geography, Business Studies or Religious Studies. Independent APs and FE colleges were generally less likely to offer a GCSE in Science in comparison with other AP types: the case studies found that some APs would have liked to expand science provision but often had limited facilities, such as lack of space to create a laboratory.

Some APs indicated that part of the reason for offering GCSEs was that they are recognised by the Progress 8 measurement, and so would contribute to a school's performance in cases where pupils were dual-registered. This helped APs to market themselves to schools to attract referrals. Some AP leaders reflected that this emphasis on GCSEs may not always be the most suitable option for young people coming to them late in Key Stage 4.

*"What's made life very difficult is that a lot of the courses that we found very valuable with our young people, particularly if we were getting them very late in KS4 and it meant that they could complete a qualification in a short space of time, are now no longer recognised by the government and are not recognised by things like Progress 8."*

**Headteacher, AP academy, all-through, North West**

In some cases, AP leaders felt that in order to best support the progress of their students towards good post-16 destinations, it was important to offer a range of GCSE qualifications, for the following reasons:

- **Matching the mainstream:** In alignment with decisions made in their curriculum offer, AP leaders thought it was important to give students, where possible, equal

opportunities to take qualifications that they would ordinarily take in mainstream schools.

*“Every student needs to leave here being able to progress at 16 as if they've never been to a PRU, so the same as their peers who've come out of mainstream.”*

**Headteacher and AP Strategic Lead, Pupil Referral Unit, all-through, East of England**

- **Entry requirements of post-16 education providers:** Several AP leaders stated that FE colleges and other post-16 providers, including apprenticeships, required good quality GCSE passes. It was therefore considered a necessity to offer GCSE qualifications in order to enhance students' chances of being placed in a good post-16 destination.
- **Relative ease of obtaining a lower GCSE grade.** A few APs indicated that GCSEs were being offered as they felt it was 'easier' for students to achieve a lower level GCSE grade than an equivalent Level 2 qualification.

### **Perceived gaps in or issues with the range of qualifications available**

Three-quarters of APs viewed the level and range of qualifications available at their AP as sufficient and appropriate to their pupils' needs. This did not differ by AP type (PRU, Independent AP etc), but larger APs, catering for more than 60 pupils, more frequently reported gaps in their qualification provision.

Where gaps in qualifications were suggested, these were often in specific vocational areas such as landscape construction, travel and tourism, and retail. It should be noted that there was no consistent pattern around desired subjects, or qualification level amongst AP leaders. Perceived gaps were often heavily dependent upon the individual AP cohort, with one PRU, for example, noting that recently they had received a larger number of female pupils from referrals and were now searching for different vocational qualifications that better suited their area of interest (as its current sports and construction qualifications were less popular).

AP leaders did stress that whilst they were aware that a number of vocational qualifications in the above areas were currently available, they were not in a position to offer them in their AP setting. There were three key reasons for this:

- APs did not always have the facilities to deliver vocational qualifications on-site
- A lack of time, due to a focus on curriculum teaching in core subject areas (especially for students who have missed a lot of education before joining the AP setting)
- Traditional vocational qualifications such as BTECs appear to now have more of an academic focus (e.g. the introduction of written examinations), and therefore

are not offering a clear alternative for students who are less able to complete GCSEs.

AP leaders commonly had concerns about the assessment format of GCSEs in relation to pupils with SEMH needs. APs with a large proportion of these pupils suggested that the change in GCSE curriculum towards terminal assessment had been particularly difficult for their students:

*“For SEMH there needs to be continuing assessment to prove what a child who is in and out of care is able to do. Their behaviour can vary enormously, and one-off exams can be affected.”*

Headteacher, AP academy, secondary, West Midlands

## Teaching and learning approaches

AP leaders were asked what teaching and learning approaches they employed, how they decided upon this approach, and what evidence they had to suggest that these approaches were effective.

APs across all types most commonly employed general approaches such as smaller class sizes, and personalised or one-to-one tuition, rather than pedagogical approaches designed specifically for a particular student group (e.g. SEND, or students with a history of violent behaviour). Generally, it was also the case that approaches did not vary for different types of pupil. Small class size was seen as the fundamental teaching method, allowing teachers to focus more closely on the individual needs of students, and an essential starting point to managing students' behaviour. Class sizes were often no larger than 6-8 students, with both a teacher and teaching assistant present. The emphasis on small class sizes was consistent across all sizes of AP, even for those with 60 or more students.

In addition to small class sizes, AP leaders and teachers implemented general pedagogical approaches around the following four areas:

- **De-escalation**<sup>13</sup>: APs strongly focused on de-escalation, attempting to remove the need for physical intervention. Informal training on de-escalation techniques were commonly delivered internally by experienced staff members (often the head

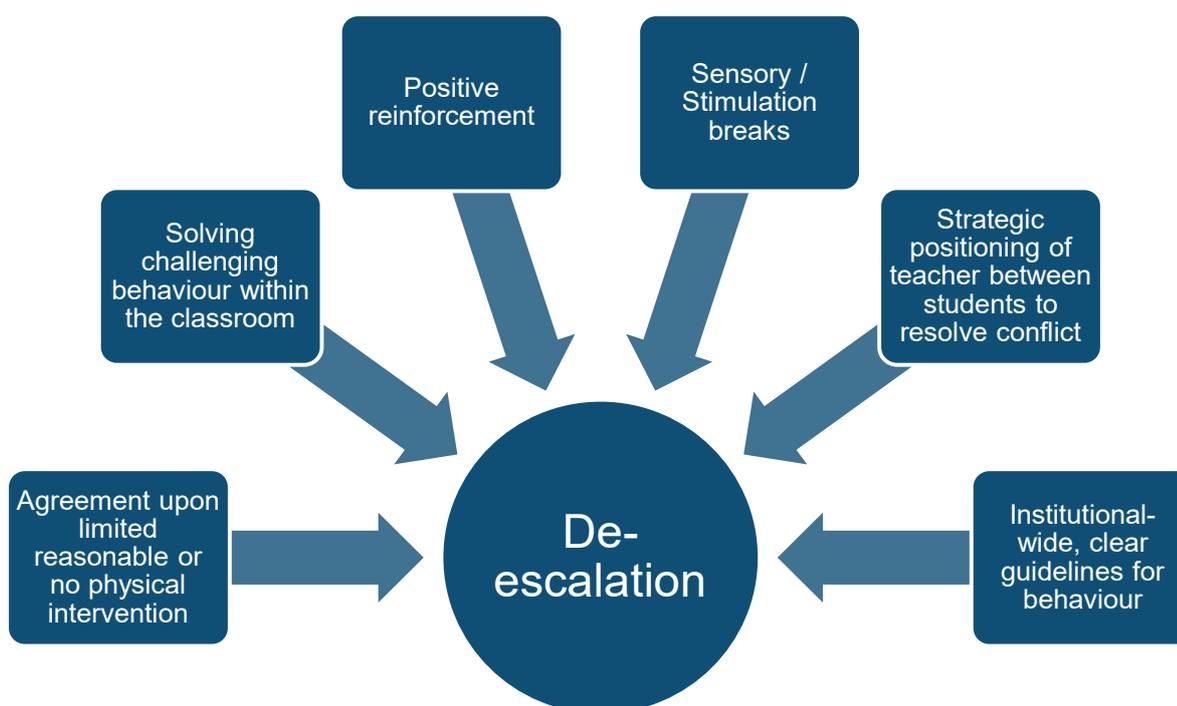
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<sup>13</sup> Broadly 'de-escalation' in a teaching and learning environment refers to techniques designed to calm a student who displays signs of violence or agitation. Examples of techniques used at both an individual teacher level and institutional level are displayed on the following page

teacher), though several APs reported that all teaching staff had been through externally delivered “team-teach” training on the issue.

The “team-teach” approach to de-escalation aligns strongly with other Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) approaches used by APs. Leaders and staff often indicated that an overall pedagogical approach focused on de-escalation, was supported by use of other PBS techniques such as continuous positive reinforcement, school-wide behavioural expectations and providing ‘sensory or stimulation breaks’ (more commonly used with younger students as a calming measure).

**Figure 5.2 Techniques used to support de-escalation**



- **Special purpose spaces:** APs also made use of different ‘spaces’ for particular learning purposes in order to manage students’ behaviour and provide a calmer and quieter environment for study. The size and noise level of mainstream schools was particularly difficult for some students, especially those with autism or other SEND. Aside from purpose-built or assigned spaces, AP leaders also were often keen to express the importance of school being a ‘safe space’ for students, which for many contrasted heavily with a chaotic and difficult home life. In several instances AP leaders noted that students may stay in school later than the required hours to do their homework quietly, as they felt they were unable to do so at home. Other examples of how ‘spaces’ are being used by APs as a pedagogical approach include:

- **Gardening space:** aligning with study of a BTEC in Horticulture qualification, but also to promote collaboration, communication and social skills.
- **'Care rooms':** Implemented by one secondary PRU to allow new pupils 'breathing space' to come to terms with leaving their old school and understand more about their history and family circumstances. A pupil would be in a 'care room' with a Higher-level teaching assistant (HLTA) and potentially another student, for their whole first week at the PRU, also giving them a chance to understand behaviour policies and choose courses.
- **'Breakout' rooms** (sometimes referred to as 'calm down' rooms): Several leaders reported they had separate spaces for individual students to allow them to express anger or frustration in a safe environment, separate from other students.
- **Anti-isolationism:** APs often adopted an 'anti-isolation' approach to their teaching, in direct contrast to the experience many of their students had in mainstream education. Leaders noted that students in AP may spend a vast amount of time in mainstream school out of the classroom as a result of their behaviour. For most APs, the primary consideration was to resolve a conflict between students, or an individual issue, within the classroom.

*"We don't do isolation here, and that's something I'm quite proud of. A lot of our students will say that's where they've been, but they're not going to be doing any learning there. They need to be in the classroom."*

**Teacher, Further Education college, Yorkshire and the Humber**

### **AP case study – Pedagogical approach, use of de-escalation techniques**

This secondary independent AP in the North of England decided to alter their pedagogical approach to teaching by reviewing the processes in place at other local providers. They found that physical intervention was a regular occurrence in the local PRU that was the main source of referrals to the AP.

The Headteacher of the AP felt that continued physical intervention 'normalised' violent behaviour. They changed their approach to reduce the use of restraint whilst at the same time reducing risk and de-escalating behavioural situations in different ways. All staff were trained in 'team-teach' techniques and have implemented a policy such that in any situation it is asked whether physical intervention is 'proportional and necessary'. As a result, physical interventions rarely occur now at the AP.

In support of the general de-escalation approach put forward in 'team-teach' the AP also implemented an all-school reward system, with pupils able to gain points each week to allow them to participate in Friday afternoon reward sessions. Points are rewarded for attitude, attendance, completion of work and other good behaviour. When damage to school property occurs, this results in a reduction of the 'reward' budget, which pupils are aware of. The AP leader felt that as a result of these changes there are now minimal cases of restraint used, with overall attendance also increasing considerably.

## **Evidence for the success of teaching and learning approaches**

Figure 5.3 depicts the most commonly used forms of evidence that APs cited for their approach to teaching and learning. When asked about what evidence they used for gauging the success of their teaching and learning approaches, APs across all types most commonly indicated that their approach had been validated by improved academic attainment, with this often linked to positive post-16 outcomes for secondary APs. A slightly smaller group viewed improved attendance and that it was now easier for them to identify the type of learning and support a student needs, as the key evidence that they had judged their approach to be successful.

For those with KS4 students, qualification outcomes benchmarked against national KS4 outcomes (and compared with other AP settings), was the key metric for APs to measure success. Primary AP leaders also noted improved attainment as an important measure to evidence the success of their teaching and learning approach, as well as successful reintegration into mainstream provision.

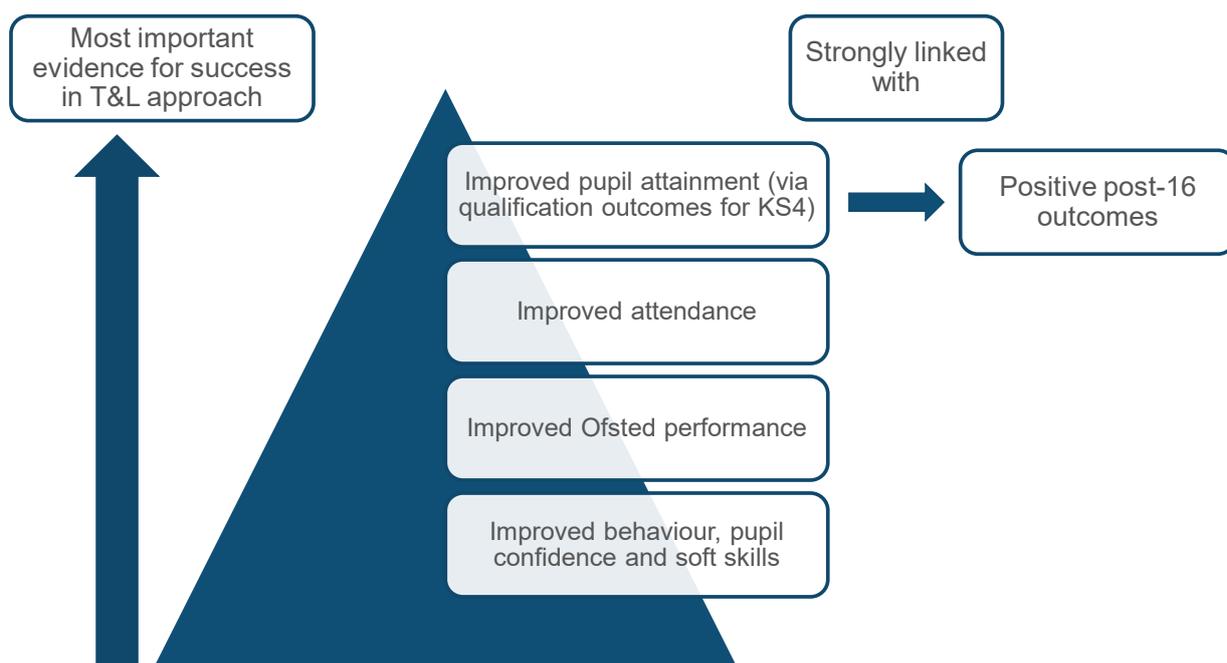
*“(On evidence for teaching and learning approach) we use stats on how quickly we can get children back into a mainstream school or into a more suitable AP.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, Primary, North West**

A few APs also mentioned that an improved Ofsted performance was a key indicator for the evidence of their decisions made around teaching and learning approach.

In case study visits, pupils often related the progress that they made in the AP, to feeling “more confident”, both in regard to their future prospects and in their social skills, such as talking to adults and other pupils. Whereas AP leaders most commonly focused on academic attainment as a means of evidencing progress externally (i.e. to post-16 providers or employers), improvement in pupil behaviour, confidence and communication skills was often reported to post-16 destinations (as well as ‘internally’ to parents and carers) as evidence of progress, in addition to qualifications. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

**Figure 5.3 Evidence of teaching and learning approaches: most common mentions**



## Monitoring student progress

Across AP provider types, leaders reported a number of different ways that student progress was monitored, which are addressed in the sections below:

## Frequent behavioural monitoring processes

As part of their monitoring process some APs conducted pupil assessment on either a daily or weekly basis, often with a more formal written summative assessment every half term. Daily or weekly assessment most commonly consisted of informal discussions with staff members, at the end of the school day focusing on students' attendance, behaviour and emotional wellbeing rather than academic attainment. In such discussions, staff would note any students they feel were particularly at risk based on their recent behaviour or attainment in classes, and whether there was need for upcoming intervention.

Some APs also reported that daily progress reports played a more formal role in their monitoring of student progress, forming part of the data that would be used for monthly or half termly reviews:

*“We have a monthly progress report that we send out to schools, and a daily diary. [For the daily diary] We have 1-10 scoring, where from day 1... so it could be that they come in and they won't communicate with anyone, and then you draw them out, so when they communicate and engage we might score them 7 or 8 out of 10.”*

**Managing Director, Independent AP, all-through, South**

## Baseline and half-termly/termly summative assessments

Baseline assessments when a student was first referred to an AP were used as a fundamental tool in tracking academic progress amongst students. Once the initial baseline assessment had been undertaken, APs would commonly assess students against their baseline measures approximately every six weeks or half term. Secondary APs used internal baseline assessments to assess Mathematics and English ability, with a minority reporting using baselines assessment across all subject areas. APs did consult the assessment data provided to them by referring schools, but this could often be out of date (for example if the pupil had subsequently spent a lot of time absent from school). APs also preferred to assess the pupils against the learning objectives they had set, rather than those used by the school, as they felt these were more individualised.

Whereas some APs integrated data from baseline assessments, and half termly summative assessment (as well as mock examinations for GCSE students) into Student Information Management Systems (SIMS), RAG (Red, Amber and Green) testing was also used as a less formal continuous tracker of academic progress. RAG indicators of progress were used in several different ways. In some instances, students are RAG rated against internal learning objectives, and reviewed half-termly or termly. This approach was most common amongst smaller APs, and APs with a limited number of Key Stage 4 pupils. In other examples, GCSE pupils were RAG rated against National Curriculum

learning objectives, in attempt to align progress monitoring more strictly with expectations of mainstream learners:

*“We use a system called climbing frame where we have the national curriculum objectives on and we mark the children off against the national curriculum objective, the information is then given to our data manager and six times a year we collect the data and that's rag rated. We can see which children are making matching, exceeded or below expected progress.”*

**Headteacher, Secondary Pupil Referral Unit, South**

### **Data collection - Student Information Management Systems (SIMS)**

A few APs collected student progress data via their Student Information Management System (SIMS), in half termly or termly data collection periods. One leader in a case study visit stated that the introduction of SIMS in their AP was a direct consequence of an Ofsted concern around a weakness in monitoring. Whereas this specific reason for moving towards a fully integrated student management system was not highlighted frequently amongst other APs, the desire for robust monitoring tools was often mentioned by leaders, with several also employing independent data managers to help them interpret progress data and set target grades for qualifications or achievable lesson outcomes.

### **Tracking emotional well-being**

Whereas IT monitoring systems such as SIMS were predominantly used to track academic progress, there were a number of different methods used to track pupil's emotional and mental health. These included many of the same tools used by schools to help them identify and assess the support needs of pupils at risk of exclusion (discussed in Chapter 3) such as Boxall profiles and B-Squared.

### **Challenge of monitoring primary and 'soft outcome' progress**

One challenge prevalent across AP types, but a particular issue for primary APs, was the ability to monitor progress amongst lower academic ability pupils, as well as finding suitable measures for 'soft outcomes' such as concentration, engagement and social skills.

Primary APs indicated that the removal of levels has made it difficult to compare the progress between individual students, especially when students are only able to make very small, but significant steps. Equally, a further challenge for all APs was a difficulty in finding suitable benchmarks for soft outcome progress. For example, one independent AP stated that they considered a particular student to be showing progress if they removed their hood in class, but it was very difficult to record this progress on a recognisable measure.

### **AP case study – Challenges in monitoring primary school pupils**

This primary Pupil Referral Unit highlighted the difficulty in demonstrating progress when a pupil was still well below expected levels for their age

Staff pointed out that there was no recognition for seemingly small steps such as where a pupil would or could not even put pen to paper or sit with others in a classroom upon admission, but could do so upon leaving the AP setting. Whereas the staff and parents saw a large change in the well-being and emotional progress of the pupils, they felt that there was not a clear way to show the progress that had been made to mainstream schools. Across the board there was little evidence of the use of formal well-being measures to demonstrate progress, with most APs relying on attendance and behavioural metrics.

The headteacher reported that ‘progress . . . is not always recognised [externally]’, and that the removal of ‘levels’ in reporting primary progress has made it ‘hard to compare’ the standards pupils are achieving.

In order to measure pupil progress as effectively as possible, staff undertook a review of systems used by local schools in the area, and replicated a system that appeared to be most useful to them, matching objectives to marks (even with softer outcomes) and judging whether a student has achieved above, below or as expected. Although this method was found to be a good practice in tracking pupils internally, the AP still reported it was difficult to evidence progress externally.

## **Sharing progress with mainstream schools**

AP leaders were asked whether information around a student progress was routinely shared with the referring institution. Most APs confirmed that they did share information regarding progress with the referring school, and it was most common amongst APs to report attendance and behavioural information on a more regular basis, with academic achievement reported half-termly or termly.

Several APs noted that progress information was more structured and more closely monitored by mainstream schools where their students were dual-registered. In instances where the AP’s pupil cohort consisted predominately of permanently excluded students, progress updates, if they occurred at all, would usually take the form of an informal discussion with a school leader, rather than via formalised sharing of reports.

*“If the school are interested, and sometimes they are, then we’ll share that information. But anecdotally we might do it rather than formalising that as something we would send*

*on a regular basis. If they're here as a dual-registered student then obviously we share that all the time. But if they become on our roll permanently then schools generally are not interested. They might ask us how they're getting on but they're not really asking. The majority of cases I would say no."*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, South**

School leaders also acknowledged that student progress information was frequently provided by APs. All school types most commonly monitored students' progress at an AP by reviewing data on attendance, behaviour and academic progress from the AP, with many schools also receiving more detailed reports on progress. Some schools also conducted regular site visits to APs as part of their quality assurance checks, but also to gain a first-hand update on how students were managing academically and emotionally following referral, and to conduct progress meetings with AP staff.

Aligning with statements from AP leaders around the sharing of information, schools noted receiving a mixture of less formal daily and weekly updates on behaviour and attendance, and more formal half termly and termly academic attainment reports. Schools' monitoring of students at APs did not differ with regards to the student characteristics.

## **Sharing progress with parents**

AP leaders emphasised the importance of sharing regular progress updates with parents, in order to successfully engage them with their child's study at an AP setting. In general, parents were also satisfied with the frequency and format of updates received from APs. This was a very different experience from the progress information they received from mainstream schools.

Parents were quick to note that the tone of communication of AP staff was much more positive, even in instances where they were alerting them that their child had not attended class. The frequency of updates was also well received, with AP staff commonly contacting parents via phone calls, emails or text message multiple times a week. These calls may be to give small updates on academic progress or behaviour within a specific lesson, such as being able to sit still for a whole lesson, or not talking to other students when they were not meant to. FE colleges reported less frequent updates of progress to parents, typically delivering these through open days, parents' evenings and termly reports.

Whilst parents generally found the mix of informal (daily or weekly) and formal (termly) updates to be useful, they felt that the clearest measure of progress was via their own observation at home. Some explained that they were now leading a calmer home life, and family relationships had improved since their child had entered an AP setting:

*“My son laughs for the first time since he started secondary school.”*

**Parent of boy in Year 10, AP academy**

Several APs also used their school information management systems and other software to regularly update parents on student progress. This was viewed as a way to engage parents in ‘real-time’ on what their children were doing in classes, and to let students know that their parents would be aware of their behaviour:

**AP case study – alerting parents of student progress**

This small, out-of-school setting, Independent AP uses Class Dojo – an online behaviour tracking system app to update parents with their child’s progress. Dojo is accessible to all staff who use a points-based system based on student behaviour. Students can lose or gain points in each lesson depending upon their performance against a set of behavioural objectives assigned to them.

Parents can log in to view real-time updates on their child’s scores and make comments on the app that are viewable by staff. Parents and staff felt that the app delivered a level of transparency that was useful to build a level of trust between the parent and the AP.

The headteacher reported that parents had become more involved in their child’s education after downloading the app and in some cases even used the app to let staff know they were bringing their child in to school when it became clear that they had not attended class on the app.

Two-thirds of AP leaders felt parents were either fairly engaged or very engaged with their child’s placement in AP. However in AP case study visits it was challenging to recruit sufficient parents to take part in an interview for the research and several AP headteachers explained that the level of parental engagement with the AP was limited, evidenced by fairly low attendance at open days or parent evenings.

One reason for this was that parents sometimes had SEND themselves, coupled with difficult home life situations. Some parents may have rarely attended school when they were younger and had very negative experiences of education. The referral period was therefore seen as the most important time to engage parents with their child’s education in AP. Some AP leaders specifically felt that if a parent was not engaged during this period, it was often difficult to involve them once their child was placed.

## The pupil perspective on AP

Pupils were generally positive about their experience within AP settings. The good relationships built with teachers in AP was the main difference for pupils, with many benefitting from the additional attention received as part of a smaller staff to pupil ratio, and describing how staff spoke to them 'more like adults' (e.g. some APs allowed pupils to use staff members' first names).

*"My last school was vile; the teachers were horrible...this place lets me be me, I don't feel trapped."*

**Year 11 pupil, AP free school**

Smaller class sizes were particularly appreciated by those who suffer from anxiety and had difficulties with the noise levels and number of students at mainstream schools. A small minority of students however did find the small size of an AP 'boring,' stating that they had more friends in their mainstream school. They also found the close supervision of staff members to be frustrating, giving them less freedom than in mainstream schooling.

Most students were positive about the curricula they were studying in AP, with very few saying they were unable to study subject areas or qualifications that they wanted to. Some also found that the blend of vocational and classroom-based learning better matched their interests than in mainstream schools.

*"I get the opportunity to work in a shop once a week. At my old school work experience was just a one off."*

**Year 10 pupil, PRU, North East**

However, there were a few examples of pupils who were studying for GCSEs, who felt that the range of subjects was more limited than they could do in their mainstream school, and who had concerns about the implications of this for progressing to A-levels or further study. Many of these pupils had either been excluded for one-off incidents early in Year 11, or were in AP for mental health reasons such as anxiety or depression, rather than for poor behaviour, and had aspirations to go to university.

## AP staffing

Although APs most commonly had between 1-9 employed staff in teaching roles, a significant number of teaching/learning support assistants, administrative and other-non-

teaching staff<sup>14</sup> were working in AP settings. Three-fifths of the APs interviewed in this research employed more than 20 staff members in total, fulfilling a number of different roles. The majority of 'non-teaching' roles across all AP types were filled by teaching or learning support assistants. Teaching and learning support assistant roles occasionally included individuals who were currently training for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), but in case study visits it was more commonly noted by AP leaders that teaching and learning support assistants may have had no previous direct teaching experience. Leaders often felt that the ability to handle difficult situations, and to connect with students, was more important for entry level roles than an experienced background within education.

One AP academy for example, employed 75 staff in total, including 20 teaching staff. Non-teaching staff members were employed as 'educational workers,' as it was felt they would interact well with the student in the AP. Their role was predominantly in providing behaviour support to assist teaching staff, but some also acted as coaches and mentors for students.

Just over half of APs employed staff in teaching roles without QTS. This was typically because leaders again felt that overall suitability for the job was a more important criterion than QTS, or that specialisms in particular areas were more desirable.

*"(We recruit non-QTS staff) because they are better suited to our students. We recruit based on the person being the right fit for our school environment not based on their qualifications."*

**Headteacher, independent AP, secondary and post-16, South East**

*"(Non-QTS staff are employed because of their specialist knowledge around complex autism and their specialist training and qualifications. It can be difficult recruiting staff with specialist knowledge."*

**Headteacher, independent AP, all-through, East Midlands**

Non-QTS staff were employed in teaching roles for specialisms related either to dealing with specific learning needs around SEND, or for activities that relate to more vocational learning. A few APs did employ non-QTS teaching staff in core subject areas, however gaining qualified teaching status was considered a requirement of their continual professional development programme at the AP.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Non-teaching' roles includes any role that is not that of the primary teacher in the classroom. Examples include, teaching and learning assistants, mentors, administrative staff and specialist professionals such as educational psychologists.

Smaller APs were therefore less likely to employ teaching staff without QTS status, as their curriculum was often more limited and focused on teaching in core subject areas, without the scale to offer more specialist provision.

## Staff training and development

APs considered staff training and CPD to be a vital element in allowing them to provide tailored teaching to their students. Where many APs had a fairly low proportion of full-time teaching staff, knowledge sharing was deemed very important in raising teaching standards. Leaders in smaller settings were aware that the potential for upward progression in terms of job roles for teaching staff was limited, and in order to retain teachers, they needed to offer plentiful training opportunities.

The need for training in certain areas was often identified in one-to-one meetings between the Head Teacher (or senior staff member in larger institutions) and teaching staff at the beginning of the academic year. In such meetings CPD plans and targets for the year would be developed and internal or external training requirements suggested. It was common for AP leaders during case study visits to say that they would like to provide more external training for staff, but that they were constrained by lack of funding. APs reported a number of different ways internal and external training/CPD is delivered at their institutions:

### Internal training

- **Weekly/Bi-weekly staff meetings:** acting as knowledge sharing meetings between staff, these regular internal meetings provide an opportunity to discuss successful teaching tools and best practice.
- **Training in specific topics:** Most APs deliver training around more general aspects of working in an AP setting such as behaviour management, safeguarding and the Prevent duty.

## **AP case study – staff training and CPD**

This secondary PRU closes the centre every Monday afternoon in order to deliver mandatory internal staff training. Each week there is a different focus to the training, and all staff members, including non-teaching staff, attend to encourage the philosophy that ‘teaching must extend beyond the classroom’. Recent topics covered included mental health and attachment theory.

Staff are encouraged to go on external training sessions if they feel that there is a gap in their learning. Furthermore, the headteacher ensures that teaching staff maintain regular contact with teachers in mainstream school in order to share best practice and understand how challenging behaviour is being handled. AP staff also provided training to mainstream teaching staff in the local area on de-escalation techniques. As a result of this communication, both local schools and the AP committed to not using physical restraint as part of their teaching.

### **External training**

A few APs in case study visits said that they encouraged middle and senior leaders to take the National Professional Qualification for Senior Leaders (NPQSL). Examples of more specialist external training courses included Team-teach de-escalation training, and training in dealing with weapons and identifying sexual exploitation.

It was noted in an interview with a hospital school leader that the limited availability of CPD provision in certain areas relating to SEND was a challenge. In particular there was a lack of suitable mental health training offered by local authorities, and staff members would have to be very proactive in seeking out training opportunities in this area, on some occasions paying for the sessions themselves:

*“CPD is sometimes a challenge. There is no network or system of provision within the Local Authority for mental health units. This means staff have to be proactive in seeking out training opportunities, even to the extent of paying for it themselves.”*

**Lead teacher, hospital school, secondary, South**

### **Staff recruitment and retention**

Recruitment was generally a more pressing concern for APs than staff retention, with two in five APs experiencing recruitment difficulties and just one in ten experiencing difficulties in staff retention. There were no substantial differences in regard to staff recruitment and retention amongst different types of AP.

Where APs did experience recruitment difficulties it was often not in a specific subject area, with 'general teachers (non-subject specific, with the ability to teach a range of subject areas)' reported as the type of staff that they found difficult to recruit, followed by Mathematics and English teachers. Where APs faced difficulties in recruiting staff in core subject areas (Maths and English), it was not due to any specific demands of teaching these subjects within an AP setting, but rather leaders felt that *all schools* (AP or mainstream) had problems with recruiting teachers in these roles.

Issues in recruiting teaching staff in general, were not due to a lack of applications but rather a case of AP leaders finding it hard to find 'the right person for the job'. It was felt that working in AP required a different skill set from mainstream schooling, with more need for resilience, patience and openness to different teaching pedagogies.

Teachers interviewed in case studies reported that they enjoyed the variety and challenge of working with young people in AP. Those who had previously worked in mainstream schools also indicated that the more pupil-centred approach in AP was particularly rewarding:

*"I really like that everything we do here is tailored to the individual young person. What I really didn't like about mainstream secondary school was how much it felt like a factory. Kids came with all kinds of different baggage, depending on their individual history, but they were expected to do the same thing and reach the same targets, at the same time, regardless of who they are and what they need."*

**Lead teacher, hospital school, secondary, South**

AP staff also preferred the small sizes of AP settings in comparison with mainstream schools. Some felt that the challenge of working with children who had severe behavioural difficulties unified staff members and contributed to many APs retaining staff for long period of time.

For the small number of APs who did have difficulties retaining staff, this was primarily due to the intense nature of the work involved. AP leaders indicated that staff needed to feel that working in this sector was their 'vocation,' and on occasion, new staff found the unique challenges of supporting pupils in AP to be unmanageable. In rural areas, the APs interviewed were twice as likely to report difficulties retaining staff, in comparison with urban areas (at around two in ten, compared with one in ten).

## Chapter 6: Reintegration into mainstream education

This chapter explores reintegration from AP back into mainstream provision. Firstly, it explores the extent of reintegration, decision-making around this process, and the ease of finding a suitable placement. It then discusses experiences of reintegration, drawing on school and AP perspectives of what works well and the challenges, including information-sharing. Finally, it explores school and AP perspectives on parents'/ carers' role in the reintegration process.

### Chapter summary

Around nine in ten APs expected at least some of their full-time pupils to return to mainstream schools or colleges, and around half aimed to reintegrate all or most of them. Where reintegration into mainstream provision was not a planned outcome for all their pupils, this was typically because pupils have SEND and need more specialist provision, or are seen as unable to cope with mainstream education. Where the main reason for referral in to AP was permanent exclusion, reintegration for 'all' or 'most' pupils was less likely to be an intended aim as these pupils were mostly in KS4.

It was also not uncommon for APs to report schools as being unwilling to take back year 10 and particularly year 11 students because of academic pressures on schools' GCSE results. This was readily admitted by schools themselves, where they felt students would have missed too much of the curriculum. In other cases though, pupils or parents/carers did not want a return to mainstream education, preferring the smaller class sizes and the child feeling more settled in the AP environment.

The decision on whether reintegration was appropriate for a pupil was typically discussed between the AP and the referring or new school, and in some cases parents/carers, educational psychologists and the LA would be involved. Factors influencing the decision on reintegration to mainstream education included the child's behaviour (especially if exclusion was behind the initial referral to AP), academic progress, attendance, and pupil or parent/carer preference.

There were mixed views from AP on the ease of finding suitable placements in mainstream provision. APs reported some mainstream schools being reluctant to take pupils from AP (typically because of concerns about their behaviour, feeling that they would not be able meet the child's needs, and/or concerns about their likely academic performance). Difficulties finding mainstream providers willing or able to take on pupils from AP was a particular challenge for pupils that had been permanently excluded, and in rural areas with fewer local mainstream providers.

Schools and APs shared common views of the processes required to facilitate a smooth reintegration process for the pupil. These included good communication between the AP,

the school, the pupil and the parent/carer, setting clear academic and behavioural targets for the pupil, phased (part-time) reintegration, and additional support and mentoring for (and monitoring of) the pupil. Notably, the processes considered to be best practice amongst Schools and APs in reintegration, largely mirrored what was considered to work well in the initial referral process. APs were also often keen to remain involved in supporting the pupil after they returned to mainstream provision and felt this could play a key part in successful reintegration, but some struggled to resource this.

## The extent of reintegration

AP leaders were asked what proportion of their full-time pupils they expected to return to mainstream schools or colleges. Around nine in ten expected at least some of their full-time pupils to return to mainstream schools or colleges. Approximately one-quarter reported that they aimed to reintegrate 'all' their full-time pupils and around half aimed to reintegrate all or most of them. APs were most likely to expect to reintegrate pupils if they had arrived at the AP through a NHS referral or a managed move, whereas they were least likely to expect to reintegrate pupils who arrived because of a permanent exclusion.

*"The permanently excluded kids can't transfer to mainstream, that's about 50% of our students, so they're singularly registered with us, so there's nowhere for them to go."*

**Headteacher, AP Free School, secondary**

The intention to reintegrate all or most pupils was most prevalent amongst primary APs, and APs (all types) based in London and the South East, which is likely to reflect in part the high density of local schools. This is also reflected in the more general finding that reintegration was a more common objective in urban, rather than rural schools. The next section discusses how a lack of local schools willing to accept students from AP providers is a common reason for APs expecting pupils will not be integrated into the mainstream.

Compared with APs, reintegration into mainstream education was a lower priority among schools who made referrals to AP: when asked about the outcomes they expected from referrals to AP, less than one-third of schools cited reintegration into mainstream education. More commonly, schools hoped that the pupils would obtain qualifications that would help them progress in post-16 education or training.

## Reasons for not reintegrating

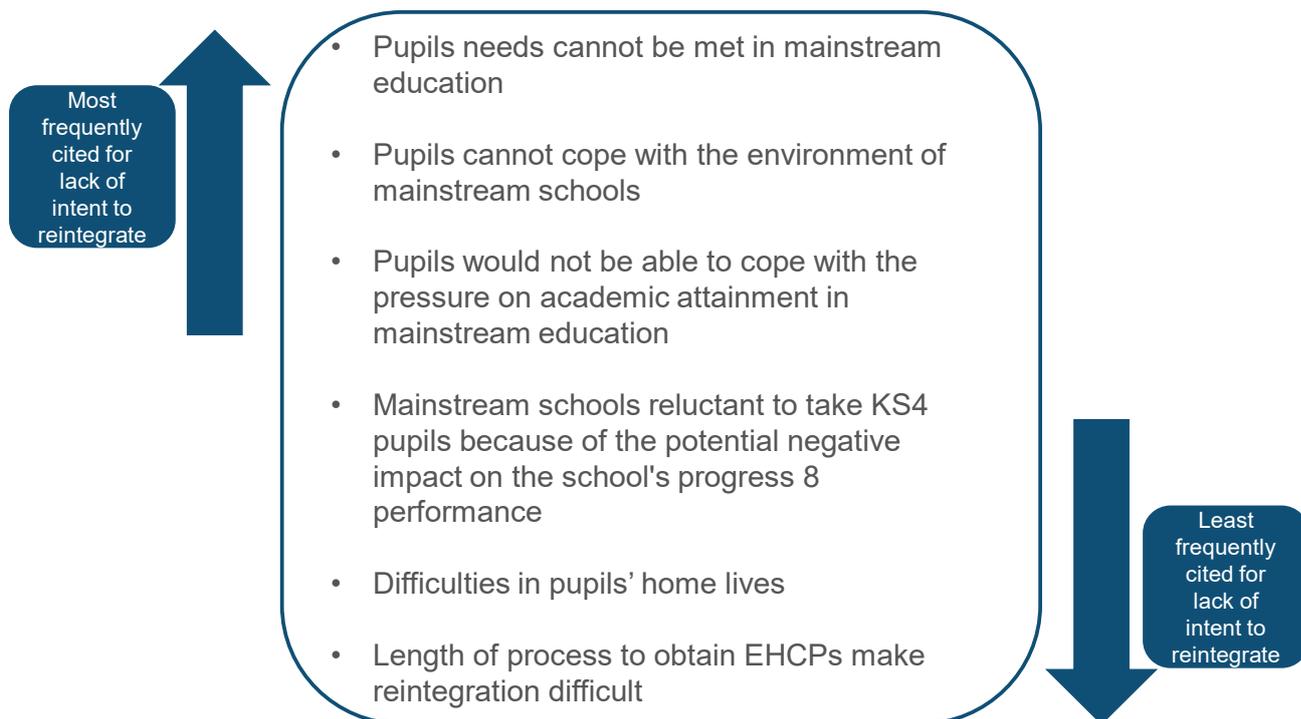
While the majority of APs aimed to reintegrate at least half of their full-time pupil cohort back in to mainstream education, around one quarter expected less than half of their pupils to reintegrate, and one in ten did not expect any of them to return to mainstream schooling (a remaining one in ten leaders interviewed did not know how many students they planned to reintegrate). There were no discernible patterns by type of AP, other than – as might be expected – plans for reintegration were less common among providers who offered long-term placements, and FE colleges (where reintegration may not be required, for example if the student could stay in FE, post-16).

Whereas in general there were not substantial differences in intent to reintegrate amongst APs in different regions, the availability of local schools that would be able and willing to accept students from AP providers was acknowledged as a key barrier for reintegration. The volume of schools in London and the South East therefore may contribute to APs in these areas intending to reintegrate most or all pupils into mainstream education, and overall those in urban locations tended to be more likely to intend to reintegrate all their pupils in comparison with those in rural locations.

FE colleges most commonly expressed that there was not an intention to reintegrate students back in to mainstream schooling. This applied to FE colleges providing pre-16 and post-16 AP, and was predominantly due to two reasons. Firstly, in some cases the intention of the initial referral was viewed as a ‘positive choice’ by the pupil and the referring school, to enable the pupil to follow a different curriculum and pursue a vocational progression route. Secondly, the desired outcomes for many of the pupils engaged in alternative provision in FE settings was often to secure apprenticeships or other work-based training, rather than continuing their education in a mainstream setting, so FE was the natural ‘next step’ for them once they reached 16.

APs were asked why they did not expect all their pupils to reintegrate in to mainstream education. The most common reasons are shown in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1 Reasons for not expecting all pupils to reintegrate in to mainstream education**



The main explanation from participating APs was that some pupils' support needs (in particular for emotional and mental health) could not be met in mainstream school, which was cited by around one-quarter of all APs, and half of APs where the main referral method for pupils was via NHS referrals (three of six). Where pupils displayed particularly challenging SEND needs, it was less common for reintegration into mainstream schooling to be a desired or intended outcome of an AP placement. Some of these pupils also arrived in an AP setting with an EHCP that stated a required need for specialist provision, which could not be accounted for in mainstream schooling (hence the reason for the initial referral). In these cases, evidence from the case studies found that lack of space in local special schools could be a reason why the pupil came into AP instead.

It was also common for leaders across all types of AP to suggest that there were pupils with certain physical or mental health issues which made reintegration into a mainstream setting less likely.

*“There are a lot more children coming through with autistic spectrum disorders, who’ve got mental health issues, and academically they probably could return to mainstream, but socially and emotionally absolutely not, the school would be too big and too stressful.”*

**Headteacher, AP Academy, all-through, North West**

A related reason reported by APs for not pursuing reintegration in to mainstream education for certain pupils, was the feeling that a pupil would not be able to cope with the environment of mainstream school. Responses centred on the scale of mainstream schools, where class sizes were larger than in AP, pupils were perceived as less likely to receive individualised support, and more likely to have difficulties with peers.

Additionally, it was felt that there was more pressure to achieve academically in the mainstream environment, and this was not suitable for some students who had SEND needs, in particular SEMH. APs who accommodated NHS referrals, predominantly related to mental health issues, most commonly raised this issue.

*“Why not all? They can’t cope with the rigour of mainstream school. A large cohort of primary that need a special school place. In terms of secondary: a cohort that need a different curriculum and approach. They can’t cope with more maths; more English etc. and they will fail in that environment. There is another cohort who will cope really well if the level of pastoral care is there but will not cope if this is not in place”.*

**Headteacher, AP academy, all-through, South**

Around one in eight APs reported that their pupils were not expected to reintegrate into the mainstream because mainstream schools did not want to accept Year 10 and Year 11 pupils. It was felt that schools were reluctant to take back Key Stage 4 pupils, as they had missed too much of the curriculum, and that they were concerned about the negative impact this could have on the school’s Progress 8 performance. A further concern was that schools remained cautious about potential disruptive behaviour among pupils who have spent time in AP. A few APs reported that some schools, as a rule, will not take back Year 11s.

*“The mainstream schools are reluctant to have them, and once they get here in KS4 they just won’t have them, because the GCSE courses are set up, they’ve missed too much, they just won’t have them. The majority of our KS4 pupils have some kind of SEN undiagnosed, and the mainstream schools do not have them back.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, secondary, North West**

This issue highlights a wider point about the challenges of reintegrating pupils in Years 10 and 11. It was common for APs to expect Key Stage 4 students to remain in AP once referred, and often considered the setting to be the optimal environment for them to obtain qualifications at this point in their learning. Reintegrating into the mainstream at this stage was considered too disruptive at an important time in the pupil’s education. While it was not uncommon for reintegration to be attempted for pupils in Year 10, it was far less common for a pupil to return to mainstream education as they approached their GCSE examinations in Year 11. Some schools do not aim to reintegrate pupils from this cohort at all if they had been in AP for more than a few weeks.

*“Most of the time students don’t come back because it would be too difficult for them to catch up with the curriculum if they’re in Year 10 or later.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, East of England**

A further challenge to reintegration, reported by a minority of around one in ten APs interviewed, was issues with pupils’ home lives, with some having turbulent home environments and parents or carers who had previously been excluded from mainstream education themselves. APs in case study visits also cited this as a difficult issue to overcome, as it could lead to some pupils considering it a normal situation to have no formal qualifications, or have sporadic attendance at school.

*“We’ve got some young people who no matter what we do, they just do not engage in anything post-16, and that could be looking at family circumstances where there’s been a benefits culture for more than 1, 2, 3 generations, and the children just think that that’s their final destination.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, all-through, North West**

One-quarter of schools who had made referrals to AP reported cases in the past few years where they had planned for a pupil to return to the mainstream, but this had not happened. The most common reason for this was that the pupil’s behaviour had not improved or had worsened. There were also some cases where the pupil was more academically successful in the AP setting and therefore their parent/ carer preferred them to stay in AP.

*“Their behaviour patterns haven’t changed. Monitoring that from my end, they are still demonstrating behaviour that showed when they were here. Therefore, bringing them back will be setting them to fail. We want to avoid that.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, London**

*“Nine out of ten times the parents decide they are not ready for mainstream education and they would rather keep them out. They have found an AP where they have been more successful, and they want to try and keep them there.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, London**

A minority of AP leaders suggested that an obstacle to reintegration was the length of time it took to obtain an EHCP if the pupil did not have one on referral.

Given the length of the process, this small group of APs felt that it was not appropriate to attempt reintegration, as a pupil may be placed back in to mainstream education, only for a newly obtained EHCP to suggest the need for specialist provision in an AP setting or special school several weeks later:

*“Very often it is because of the EHCP plan process. If a young person is undergoing a health care plan it can take up to 20 weeks. In this area it can take up to 28 weeks. And, to put a young person back into mainstream school whilst they are undergoing that process isn't sensible because they might not be going back to mainstream but into a special school and it would not work.”*

Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, all-through, South West

## **Deciding to reintegrate pupils into mainstream school**

The decision to reintegrate a pupil was usually made jointly, with involvement from staff at the AP, staff from the school the pupil would be moving to (either the referring school or a new school), parents or carers, and in some cases professionals such as educational psychologists, social workers, or the LA.

It was most common for the Headteacher or another member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) at the AP to take the lead on this decision, although in some cases the final decision was made by a consensus amongst an SMT. If the AP was not Ofsted registered (mainly small, part-time independent providers), then the referring or receiving school was more likely to play the lead role in decisions about reintegration, generally because the placement was part-time and therefore they had less in-depth knowledge of the pupil.

While parents or carers, other professionals, and the LA often had some involvement in reintegration decisions, it was less common that they played a leading role. For example, parents were sometimes involved in meetings to discuss reintegration and would input into whether their child was ready to be reintegrated or what school they would move to, but in most cases they did not tend to make the final decision. Indeed, only one in ten APs reported that pupil or parent preference was the leading factor in the decision to reintegrate.

## **Factors influencing the decision**

The decision to reintegrate a pupil was based on various factors, which gave an indication of whether the pupil was ‘ready’ to return to mainstream schooling. For AP telephone interviews, leaders were read a list of seven potential factors influencing the decision on reintegration, and asked firstly which factors influenced the decision for a pupil to return to mainstream education, and secondly which of these factors were most important.

Pupil behaviour was the most common factor influencing decisions around reintegration across all AP types, cited by seven in 10 APs as a consideration and by over one-third as

the most important factor. This factor was more important when the route to referral was exclusion (fixed-term or permanent).

Other areas taken into account in the decision-making process, by almost half of all APs, were: academic progress, pupil attendance, and parent or pupil preference. Less commonly, the pupil's health and the capacity of the school to take (back) the pupil were also factors, but where these were cited they were often very important. While these were considered to influence the decision to reintegrate a pupil, it was less common for these to be the primary factor in the process.

In a minority of cases, budget constraints of the commissioning school or pressure on places within the AP influenced when the pupil returned to mainstream provision. If the school could no longer afford to pay for AP it had commissioned or if the AP needed the space within the facility, the pupil would return more quickly than might be ideal. One school noted that these cases rarely ended in success, as the pupils were not ready to return.

*“This is where the system falls down a little, as during a 6-12-week period communication is good but at end of that, the AP need their space back, as they are so overrun. So sometimes the rate at which a child gets reintegrated is too fast and not manageable; they are set up to fail. Due to funding and space it is sometimes not possible to have a gradual reintegration.”*

**Assistant Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, East of England**

Generally however, it was quite common for leaders to say that all the factors were important (almost one in five), suggesting these APs base their decision around reintegration on a broad, holistic judgement of the pupils' educational and behavioural progress while at the AP.

## **Finding a suitable mainstream school placement**

APs were divided about whether it was easy or difficult to find a suitable permanent placement back in mainstream provision. FE colleges were most likely to suggest that finding a permanent place in mainstream education for their pupils was either fairly or very easy. This was predominantly because their pupils would continue studying at the same college following their AP placement. AP academies more commonly stated that this process was either fairly or very difficult for them.

Over half of APs based in London felt that it was either fairly or very easy to find a suitable permanent placement for their pupils. Again, the density and volume of mainstream schools within London provided these APs with a greater choice of potential schools.

APs suggested that the primary reason for difficulties in finding placements, was that mainstream schools were reluctant to take the pupils. APs perceived primary schools to be more concerned with pupil behaviour and being unable to meet their needs, whereas they found secondary schools to be more concerned about the potential impact on exam results, in particular where the majority of their referrals were Key Stage 4 pupils. A few APs reported that schools remained reluctant even when the AP could evidence the pupil's academic and behavioural progress and their readiness to return to mainstream provision.

APs regarded part of the reason for this perceived reluctance as being linked to the ethos of the school, often informed by the ethos of the Headteacher, senior management team and governing body. There was a perception that some schools were simply less willing to adapt their policies or ways of working to accommodate these pupils, than others.

*“When you’ve got schools who don’t really want to work with us, it’s not really about us, they don’t want to integrate children from a PRU, they don’t want to put the strategies in place because the idea is ‘well we’ve got our own way of working, why should we do something different with a child who’s not one of ours?’ It’s quite complex really but at the end of the day they’re reluctant to take children who come from PRUs.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, Secondary, North West**

Some APs felt that placing a pupil was difficult because of a lack of mainstream places in the area they were situated in. APs acknowledged that the volume of admissions to mainstream schools was a problem for pupils reintegrating from AP, as schools were more likely to prioritise admissions from other mainstream provision. For pupils who had been permanently excluded, sometimes by more than one school in the LA, there were often few schools available that they could potentially enrol with. This was felt more acutely in rural locations (almost a third of schools in rural locations stated that finding placements for their pupils in mainstream education was ‘very difficult’).

*“Because there are no school places. The schools are all full, and geographically, there are only a couple of schools in this area, so depending on the child and/or their need, it is possible that they have already been attending a particular school, so, they have nowhere to go.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, Secondary, North West**

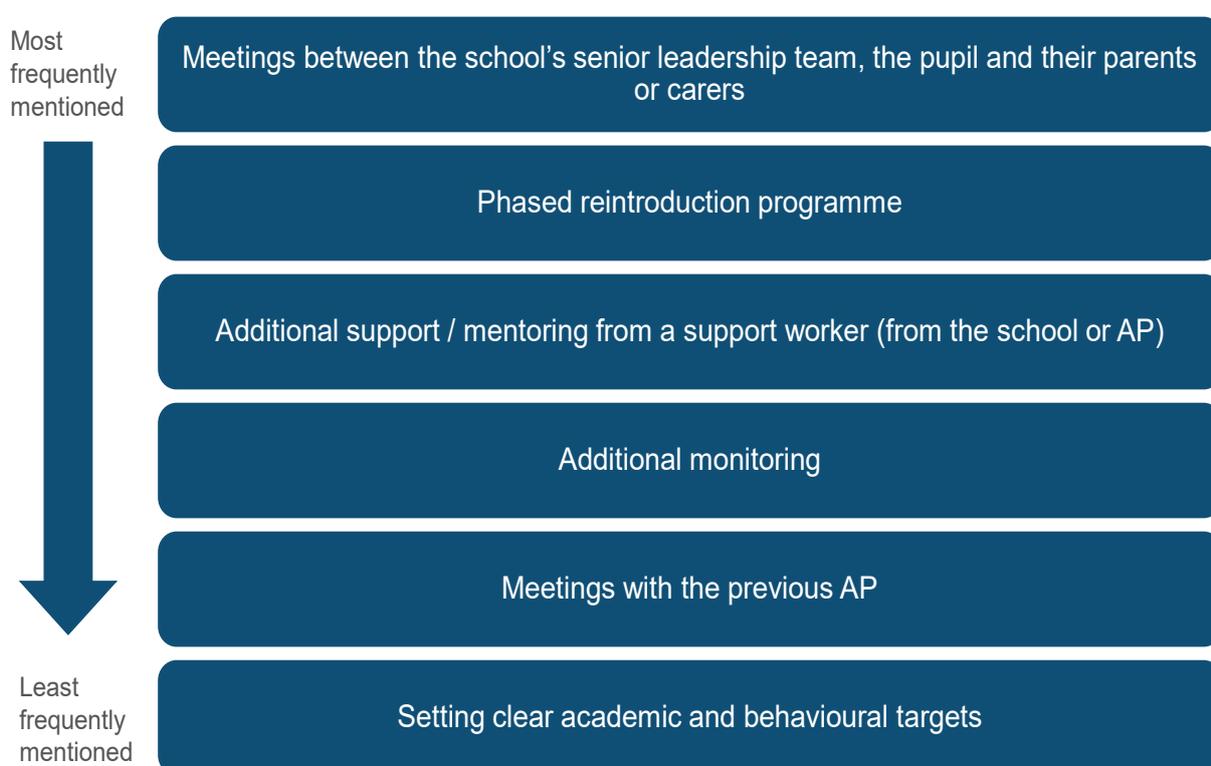
APs in the North of England were more likely to report difficulties finding a placement back in mainstream education than APs in the South or in London. A few APs in the North reported that the LA had little influence over whether schools accepted pupils or not, meaning the decision whether to take a pupil or not lay solely with the schools, who were often reluctant. One felt that LAs ‘lacked teeth’ when it came to asserting authority over schools to take pupils from AP.

## The reintegration process

### Processes used to support reintegration

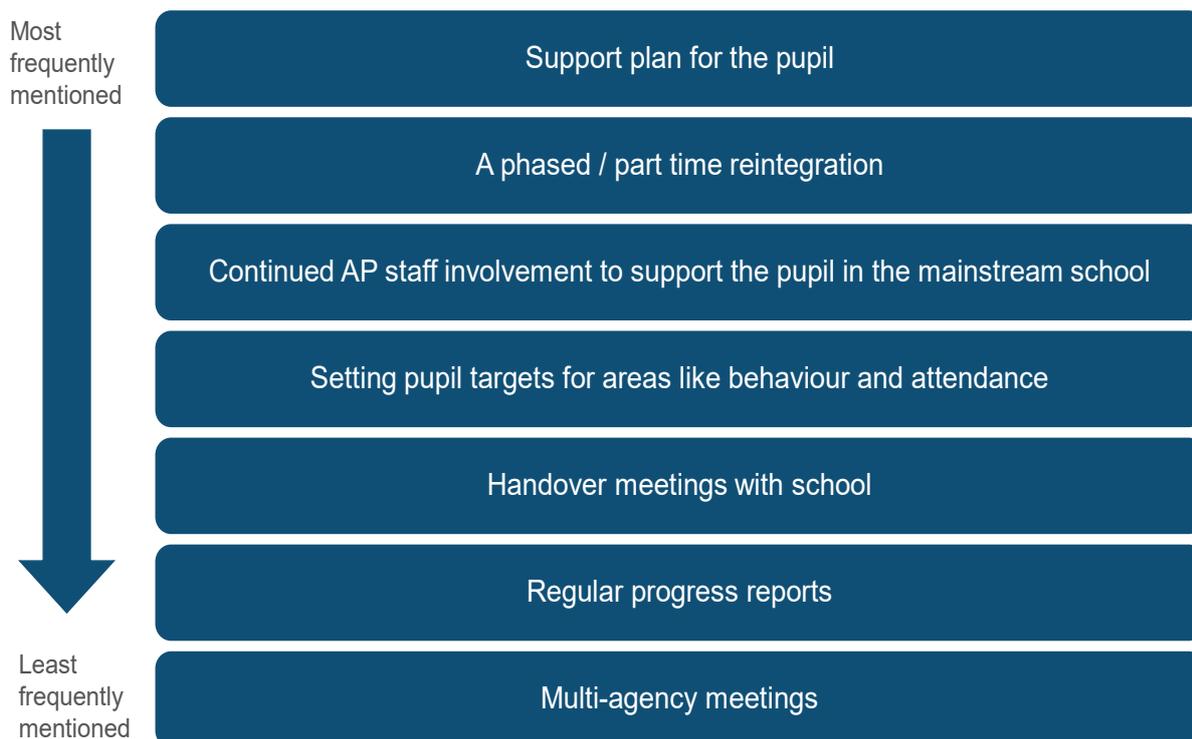
Reintegration processes differed according to factors like individual pupil needs and characteristics, and the circumstances of why they were originally referred to AP. Many of the support processes put in place by schools were in line with those identified in the REA (see Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.2 Support systems used by schools to aid reintegration (in order of most common mentions by schools)**



The majority of APs reported that they had transition plans in place for pupils to transfer back into the mainstream, and these included similar measures to those mentioned by schools (see Figure 6.2).

**Figure 6.3 Support systems used by APs to aid reintegration (in order of most common mentions by APs)**



APs with Early Years and Key Stage 1 pupils were more likely than those with older pupils to report using transition plans, and indeed the likelihood of an AP having transition plans diminished as the age of the pupils they catered for increased. The APs least likely to have a transition plan were those that provided for Key Stage 4 pupils and 17-18-year olds, which may be related to issues discussed earlier in this chapter about the limited extent of reintegration among these pupil groups, and the fact that many 17-18 year olds will move into work-based learning.

### **Processes that work well**

APs and schools alike were asked about what worked well when it came to reintegrating pupils back into the mainstream. Notably there was a degree of consensus between APs and schools about what they felt worked well to aid this transition. The most commonly cited sources of evidence for successful reintegration were: the pupil has remained in mainstream schooling for at least two terms; improvements in pupil behaviour, most often shown through behavioural data collected by the schools; and, academic progress. To a lesser extent, schools and APs reported that pupils successfully moving to post-16 destinations was evidence of a successful reintegration. Very few schools collected data on pupil well-being as evidence of successful reintegration.

## Communication

Earlier in the chapter it was noted that schools can be reluctant to enrol pupils who have been in AP, particularly if they were in AP because of a fixed-term exclusion, which can cause difficulties finding a suitable placement. Some APs reported that a pre-requisite of successful reintroduction to mainstream education was cooperation and openness on behalf of the school in taking back the pupil. In cases where this occurred, the school was often more willing to adapt to support the pupil, and be open to advice and communication from the AP. This was particularly the case when considering reintegration from hospital schools and medical PRUs.

*“The best success is where schools are willing to be flexible and inclusive, allow reasonable adjustments, assigning a point of contact for the pupils, regular reviews and an expectation that recovery and reintegration are not linear.”*

**Head of Hospital Education Service, Primary, Secondary and post-16, South West**

Generally, there was agreement between schools and APs on the need for good communication throughout the full process of referral, placement and reintegration. Some APs and schools talked about the need for ‘openness’ and ‘transparency’ and of keeping each other well informed at all these stages.

*“It’s about communication, transparency, honesty, and providing support as and when they need it, and not telling a load of fibs. So, I expect schools to be honest with me when children are referred into the centre, and I’ll be honest back to them when sending the children back.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, Secondary, North West**

## Key workers

Both schools and APs mentioned that it worked well if the pupil had support from a key worker or learning mentor during reintegration. Schools reported this was the measure that worked best for ensuring a smooth transition back in to mainstream education. This person would offer bespoke support and have built a strong relationship with the pupil during the early period of their reintegration. It was felt that this support was essential to allowing a pupil to feel more comfortable in the mainstream school, and provide an additional and trusted outlet to turn to if they were having issues.

This worker could either be from the school or AP. From the schools’ perspective, a key worker model to support reintegration was often stated to work best when provided in-house at the school,

*“Identifying the key person, which is normally the Teaching Assistant for the child, is really important as they can be released from the classroom more easily and have more time with them. For example, five minutes spent with the child first thing in the morning to try and give them a positive start to the day...it’s about building up a relationship to establish a key contact point.”*

**Co-head, mainstream maintained, primary, Midlands**

Schools did not report having a structured process for assigning key workers to particular students, rather they were assigned on an ad hoc basis, as and when required.

Where the key worker was from the AP, APs considered it important that they stay in touch with the pupil even after they were no longer accompanying them in the mainstream school. This allowed the pupil to feel continually supported and enabled the AP to work with the mainstream school to identify if there were any problems.

*“Having that touchpoint is reported to reassure the pupil that they still have the support of the AP, and somewhere to turn if they’re unhappy.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, primary and secondary, North West**

While many APs mentioned the importance of key workers in ensuring a smooth transition, some reported that due to budget constraints they were not able to carry out as much of this kind of outreach work as they would have liked.

### **Gradual / phased reintegration process**

Both schools and APs acknowledged that reintroducing a pupil into mainstream school gradually was important in ensuring the student was not overwhelmed and had time to (re)adapt. This approach often began with a site visit by the pupil, typically with a parent/ carer and key worker/ member of support staff from the AP, followed by a gradually increasing part-time schedule. Depending on the needs of the pupil, this could start from as little as one-half day or one full day per week, working towards a more full-time, typical mainstream schedule. Mainstream schools and APs alike, felt that having a gradual reintegration process, reduced the incidence of pupils bouncing back into AP.

A few APs also mentioned that starting the pupil off on only a few core subjects, most often English and Mathematics, worked well.

*“Sometimes what we do, if a child has had a period away - particularly younger students - at alternative provision, they might have one or more two days a week as a gradual sort of reintegration package where they will continue to go to alternative provision. That has worked well for some students.”*

**Deputy Headteacher, mainstream maintained, secondary, London**

*“They often start off with one core subject and one option subject rather than English, maths and science straight away - which lets them feel good about being back in mainstream and being successful.”*

**Headteacher, mainstream, secondary, East of England**

### **Involvement of parents and carers**

APs mentioned that it was important for the parents or carers of the pupil to support the decision to reintegrate. As previously mentioned, reintegration was sometimes delayed or did not happen at all, because parents or carers did not want their child to return to mainstream education. Generally, the scope for involvement of parents or carers varied depending on the individual circumstances of the referral (for example, if this was linked to exclusion or not) and there was no consistent picture on this. Things that helped achieve ‘buy in’ from parents included: clear and open communication with the parents from both the AP and the school; involving the parent at all stages of the process; and, managing parents’ expectations by outlining what is expected of the child upon their reintegration into the mainstream.

*“Persuading parents that it’s the right thing to do, saying it’s the right thing to do, and once the parents have accepted it makes life easier.”*

**Headteacher, PRU, all-through, West Midlands**

Parents in the case study interviews reported mixed experiences of whether they were consulted on whether their child was ready for reintegration. Some parents had pushed for earlier reintegration (for fear of their children falling behind academically) but professionals e.g. CAMHS, had not supported this as the child had severe mental health issues and was not ready for a mainstream environment.

Once the decision to reintegrate was made, parents were often involved in deciding where their child was placed, but only if there was a choice available. Where there was a choice, it was common for parents and pupils to visit potential schools or colleges.

During the reintegration process, schools considered it very important to involve the parents; almost half of schools mentioned this as a process used to support reintegration. Initially, this would be involving them in reintegration meetings, where expectations and intended outcomes were discussed and targets set. Parents were also often involved in ongoing meetings to assess pupils’ progress. Some schools discussed how ongoing parental support once the transition had happened was key to keeping the pupil engaged and ensuring the reintegration was a success.

## Understanding pupils' needs

APs also reported that reintegration was more likely to be a success when the school fully understood the pupil's needs. Generally, the needs were identified by the AP when the pupil was in their provision. Through transition plans and reports, discussion with the school and by encouraging schools to visit the pupil whilst in AP, the AP would try to ensure that the school had all the information needed about the pupil and understood their needs as best they could.

An initial clear understanding of pupil needs by the school was important to maintaining consistency across the AP and mainstream experience, ensuring the transition worked and was not an overwhelming change for the pupil. Consistency was achieved in the following ways:

- The AP curriculum mirrored the mainstream as closely as possible, whilst also allowing for the additional care and support pupils need in AP;
- Phased inductions to mirror any change in school hours that were also used at the AP;
- Maintaining a consistent approach towards the pupil by teachers and key workers, so that everyone had agreed to the thresholds for acceptable behaviour and what to do in response to any breaches in that. This included consistency in managing behaviour and suitable teaching methods. One AP encouraged staff from the mainstream school to observe how the pupil was taught and managed at the AP so that similar pedagogical approaches could be transferred when the pupil was reintegrated.

## Main challenges for effective reintegration

APs in case study visits reported that following reintegration in to mainstream school, some pupils did 'bounce back' into AP or become disengaged in education altogether. The following reasons explain why reintegration was not always effective.

When schools were asked about the main challenges to supporting effective reintegration into mainstream provision by far the most common reason, cited by half of schools, was that the pupil still faced the same issues in mainstream education that they struggled with when they were originally referred to AP. Primarily, these issues were that they still found it difficult to cope in large class sizes, and the lack of one to one support (this could be academic or behavioural depending on the pupil's needs). While schools may recognise these fundamental issues, many cannot provide the resources needed to address them.

The implication of this is that while the education the pupil receives in AP tends to be better suited to their needs, it does not address the problems that they originally had within the mainstream setting. For example, teaching pupils in small class sizes in the AP setting can lead to higher attainment and improved behaviour levels, but this does not necessarily mean that they will be able to maintain these levels when they are reintegrated into mainstream provision. Phased transitions and the use of key workers and mentors to provide individualised support could help to address this.

Less common challenges to effective reintegration were:

- Pupils / parents not wanting to go back
- Academic continuity/ doing qualifications in AP which the school does not offer or vice versa.
- Difficulties maintaining the relationship between the school and the child and their family/carers while off-site
- Lack of professional support available for wider needs (e.g. from CAMHS)
- Maintaining social relationships/ friendships with their peers in school
- Parental expectations (e.g. if child has performed well in AP but coming back to different conditions in mainstream school).

## Chapter 7: Post-16 outcomes

This chapter examines post-16 transitions. It explores the most commonly reported post-16 destinations, investigates the extent that APs track pupil outcomes after leaving and the methods used to do this, and reviews the provision of careers advice and transition support amongst APs.

The findings in this chapter are based on primary research with schools and APs in the telephone depths and AP case studies, and should be interpreted in the context of the available statistics on post-16 outcomes (see Chapter 1).

### Chapter summary

Most APs tracked post-16 outcomes for their pupils. This was especially true for large, full-time APs with high proportions of pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. APs who were Ofsted-registered were also more likely to track pupil outcomes post-16. However, there were a number of challenges in tracking pupil destinations, with most APs reliant on keeping in personal contact with ex-pupils to stay updated on their activities once they had left. APs commonly raised the issue that whilst tracking information was available, the data tended to miss young people with what might be considered unsuccessful outcomes (NEET), and because of this, to over-state the balance of positive outcomes.

While immediate post-16 destinations data was important, it was also critical that positive outcomes could be sustained. Even if students successfully started college or work-based training, ex-pupils tended to face many challenges. Linked to this, some teachers felt that a significant proportion of pupils who left the AP still lacked the necessary resilience to cope with mainstream life. Some headteachers also pointed out that post-16 support provided for leavers was focused on the initial transition process i.e. the first term or six months. Once that support ended, these headteachers felt that many pupils began to struggle without the same level of tailored support. APs were attempting to address this to an extent, via roles such as transition co-ordinators who offered more long-term support after the pupil had left AP, but this was limited by resource constraints.

Pupils and parents interviewed in the case studies were generally favourable about the nature and extent of careers advice and support they had received, in particular the opportunity to do work experience placements. However, a small number of parents and pupils were concerned that the narrower GCSE curriculum available in most APs was limiting their options to progress to A-levels and then to university. APs in the interviews and case studies reported that the most common post-16 routes for their pupils were FE colleges or apprenticeships/ work-based training, with only a minority planning to go back into mainstream sixth forms to do A-levels.

## The extent that APs track pupil outcomes once they have left

Three-quarters of APs tracked outcomes for their pupils. This was especially true for large, full-time APs with high proportions of pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 (in particular, PRUs). APs who were Ofsted-registered were also more likely to track pupil outcomes post-16. Independent APs, who tended to be smaller, more commonly offered part-time provision, and were less likely to be Ofsted-registered, were considerably less likely than other types of AP to monitor pupil outcomes once they had left: just over half did so. APs who were Ofsted-registered typically shared this information during inspections, to help inform Ofsted's judgements about the AP's strengths and areas for improvement.

*“Over 90% will go into college, as well as a small number who are NEETs or who go into prison, but most go to colleges or into apprenticeships. We hold onto that information and share it with Ofsted.”*

**Headteacher, independent AP, all-through, London**

APs also shared post-16 tracking information internally with their own management committees i.e. senior staff members, and externally with their LA. Some APs also received a report that was generated by an external team contracted by the LA and shared with APs, LAs and relevant FE providers. This report provided destinations of ex-pupils who had recently left the AP.

## How pupils are tracked

Tracking pupil outcomes was a challenge for APs as there was no centralised system for collecting this information. The most common method they used was reliance on personal contact with ex-pupils who had recently left, mentioned by around two in five of the APs who tracked outcomes. This was followed by feedback from teachers at the pupil's new school or FE college, feedback from parents, and feedback from the local careers service.

There were few differences between types of AP, in terms of the approaches they took to keeping track of pupil outcomes once they had left. The main exceptions were that:

- APs which catered mainly for primary-aged children in Key Stage 1 and 2, were more reliant on information from teachers in the pupils' new school, than APs which predominantly catered for secondary-aged pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. This reflects that reintegration was less common among older pupils and therefore there was less scope to collate information from the pupils' new schools.

- APs which only provided short-term placements relied more than other APs on keeping in touch with teachers, parents or careers services to track outcomes among pupils who had left.
- Smaller APs who tracked outcomes were more likely than larger APs to do so by staying in direct contact with ex-pupils, potentially finding this easier to manage because of the smaller pupil numbers involved.

There was no set procedure for staying in contact with pupils and for many APs the system was quite informal. Some APs had a dedicated member of staff, typically a 'moving on coordinator' or a 'vocational pathway lead' whose responsibility it was to contact pupils at intervals over a set period. Other APs simply relied on tutors/teachers. Common methods for staying in touch with ex-pupils included contacting their parents/carers via phone, text or email as well as visits to their FE college, and in a few cases, their home.

### **AP case study – tracking pupil outcomes**

An example of pupil outcome tracking is provided by this AP where the headteacher described their tracking methods as 'informal'. Pupils are tracked monthly for six to nine months by the vocational support officer who phones the parents of ex-pupils to check on their status. The AP felt that it was better to contact the parents of pupils, rather than the colleges the pupils had moved to, so they could have more of an honest, in-depth conversation about the pupil. Feedback on how each pupil is doing is then given to the internal management committee in the form of a report. In turn, the committee will follow up with any pupils who are struggling.

*“ We don't contact the colleges, we phone the parents, that way we can have a conversation. Often, they (the pupils) will come back and say can you help me, I've dropped out.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, Midlands**

Some AP tutors/teachers employed more innovative methods for staying in touch with former pupils, for example using social media such as Facebook, or getting in contact with them through other former pupils.

*“A site Facebook page is set up and the students are encouraged to report back the Christmas after they have left. If they go to one of the regular FE providers, then they can be tracked through other students joining them there.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, East of England**

There were several external sources AP's used for tracking information on ex-pupils. The most used source of information were FE colleges who provided APs with data on attendance and exam outcomes of ex-pupils. Some APs also accessed databases created by external career services. These databases held information on the status of ex-pupils and were updated regularly. Some external career services also had advisors who provided APs with more detailed reports on pupil outcomes. Data on pupil outcomes were also sometimes available from LAs who collected information from a range of sources including colleges, apprenticeships and other training programmes.

APs commonly raised the issue that whilst tracking information was available, the data tended to miss specific groups of young people, and because of this, to potentially overstate the balance of positive outcomes. This was simply because positive outcomes are easier to track. For example, data on pupils transitioning to colleges, participating in exams and gaining qualifications was more readily available and more accurate than data based on self-reported outcomes. On the other hand, information on pupils who were recorded as either Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or whose status was unknown, was harder to come by. Typically, where LAs did provide post-16 outcomes data to APs this tended to be at aggregate level, in the form of statistics, rather than on individual pupils. Some FE colleges also shared information with APs, for example on attendance and dropout, but this was not consistent across all colleges, and some APs felt that it was difficult to get hold of this information due to colleges being unwilling or unable to share the data.

*“Our figures show 5-10% NEET...we're working on improving tracking data – currently we only tend to get info on the ones who progress.”*

**Headteacher, AP free school, secondary**

## **How careers support is delivered**

Four in five secondary phase APs offered a careers advice service to pupils, but this was markedly less common among independent APs, where around two-thirds did so. APs offering full-time provision were also more likely than those offering only part-time provision to offer careers advice. APs who offered part-time placements, which are more likely to be small independent providers, typically regarded the responsibility for careers advice to lie more with the mainstream school than themselves.

Around two in five of the secondary phase APs who offered careers advice delivered this through an 'in house' careers service, although there was some variation in how this was delivered. This was partly explained by the considerable variety in the size and scope of APs. Reflecting this, some APs had access to a trained internal careers advice team whilst others had just one or two trained career advisors. In addition, one in five APs offered support and advice on careers on a more informal basis, by teachers who had a

general knowledge of careers, rather than trained careers advice specialists. Despite variations in the ways that careers advice was delivered, there were many reported benefits of having access to an in-house service for pupils: staff could be on hand as and when they were needed, and a known face was beneficial for pupils, many of whom struggled to build relationships.

Around one in five APs used external career advice services, which were provided by a range of groups including charities, independent careers advisors, LAs and external careers services. For the most part these careers advice services were commissioned by APs themselves or by the LA. For SEMH pupils, statutory careers advice was also provided by the LA. In addition, charities and businesses provided some APs with access to mentoring networks e.g. professionals from performing arts and creative media.

*“A number of performing arts and creative media mentoring networks provide people from the professional world of acting and film to mentor the student over the course of a year.”*

**Head teacher, AP free school, secondary**

Arrangements for paying for external careers services varied according to pupil characteristics. Pupils with a EHCP or who were categorised as vulnerable in some other way (e.g. Looked After Children) had a statutory entitlement to ‘free’ careers advice whereas APs had to pay for external careers support for their other pupils.

### **AP case study – careers service provision**

This case study AP worked hard to ensure all pupils had a positive post-16 outcome by offering a blend of in-house and external careers advice and support. The AP worked with an independent external careers service which provided one on one advice sessions and mentoring for all Year 10 and Year 11 pupils. They also used the Young People’s Service (YPS) and the National Citizens Service who offered CV enhancing activities for pupils, to help build their motivation and broaden their horizons. Teachers were also on hand to provide flexible and tailored support when needed. A good example of the kind of support they offered were mock interviews, carried out using help from a local FE college with whom the AP had developed strong links. These were valuable in improving pupils’ motivation and confidence around college applications.

APs were for the most part satisfied with the external careers advice services that they had used and felt these offered good quality advice and provided the right amount of time with pupils.

*“The external careers service is really good and it is especially important for the children to talk to someone who is not a teacher.”*

**Executive Headteacher, AP Academy, all-through, East**

A handful of APs were more negative about the external careers advice services they received. Criticism was mainly focused on the quality of the advice provided, which was regarded as poor quality or inconsistent. One AP also felt that the number of sessions that the external advice service provided to pupils was insufficient. Problems could arise if the AP was unhappy but did not hold a direct contract with the external careers service (for example, if they had bought into a Service Level Agreement commissioned by the LA), as it was not possible for them to change provider.

## **The nature of the careers support provided**

The nature of the activities provided by careers advice services varied. Most APs with a careers advice service in place aimed to provide a structured and tailored individual programme which built up over the course of Year 11, and sometimes started earlier than this, in Year 10. A small number started thinking about careers advice and next steps in Year 8 or Year 9, however this was limited, and most APs preferred to wait until they knew for certain that the pupil would be with them later in KS4. At the core of this approach, APs offered a series of one to one sessions designed to help pupils develop career plans and make informed career choices. As it became more relevant, APs would then look to provide direct support in key areas such as CV writing, college and apprenticeship applications and preparation for interviews. Many APs facilitated group sessions for these skill areas, sharing successful methods and approaches, to encourage young people to get more engaged in post-16 decision-making.

The frequency of these sessions varied, from once a term up to twice a week, and was loosely linked to the age of the pupil. At many APs, Year 11 pupils received weekly sessions or designated careers afternoons. These Year 11 pupils would also have exposure to FE colleges and apprenticeship providers at open days, which gave them an opportunity to talk with relevant teachers and trainers and ascertain information on courses they were interested in pursuing. Many APs also facilitated visits to career events and fairs to energise students about post-16 decision-making, help inform their choices and build up their career aspirations. A few even hosted their own careers events, which gave the opportunity for local employers to meet with pupils. The research among secondary phase APs found that all of them were active in supporting their pupils to find relevant courses, make applications and even accompany them on open days and college/ apprenticeship interviews.

*“We have a good careers officer, and my deputy head has taken on careers, she’s established excellent relationships with all our colleges. So the children are all taken to the colleges by us during the school day, they don’t just go to the open days, the colleges principals will come and talk to the children prior to that. We support all the children at interview, so we attend all the interviews with them, the child and the parent, so we’ll walk the walk with them. And come September, when they’ve left us, we meet them every week, I send a member of staff into the canteen at the college, and the kids know that they’ll be there, so they can go and meet, have a cup of tea, and we can make sure that everything is going to plan.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, North West**

There were often strong working partnerships in place between APs and local colleges, such as college staff coming in to the AP to build rapport with pupils and to encourage applications, trial taster days for KS4 students, and many other examples of AP/ college collaboration to take into account pupils’ needs and requirements.

The telephone interviews and the case studies alike provided widespread evidence of good information sharing between APs and colleges to inform the admissions process, supply colleges with information about the needs of individual pupils, including individual risk assessments, and help them make informed decisions about admissions. These relationships tended to be between the AP and a small number of local FE colleges. APs regarded having good relationships and information sharing with colleges as key to supporting successful choices.

*“It’s really important that information is shared as to the student’s needs. We encourage our young people on their application forms to college to declare any SEN that they have, because it ensures the college can provide it for them, so it’s important that’s in place. For children with EHCPs, we invite local colleges to their Year 11 reviews, so they can be involved in the planning right at the outset from their final year to find a suitable placement post-16. We do a lot of work with the students, so those who are more vulnerable or potentially at-risk, we might do contact and visits in college, they might go in one day a week to build up some relationships there. We also follow them once they’ve left us, so in the autumn term we have a key member of staff who tracks and monitors the progress of students through colleges and families.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, North East**

Where possible parents/carers were also included in careers activities such as completing college applications and attending career sessions, but some APs reported that, in general, many parents/carers left these activities up to the AP, with the result that it was important that the AP had the time and resources available to commit to providing this type of individualised support.

*“It is the relationship that the careers teacher has built with the admissions officers at the different colleges... and helping the young people choose the right course for them based on their skills and attitude and their expected outcomes, working with them to make sure that they fill in the form correctly, writing their CV, and making sure that they know what their appointment day and time is. We can’t rely on the parents to support the young people with this. So, it is seeing them all the way through.”*

**Principal, AP Free School, secondary, London**

Where parents were involved, they were usually consulted at scheduled events, typically parent’s evenings. In some cases, this also included meeting representatives from external career services.

*“We have a lady who comes onto our base every other Friday...and then when we have our KS4 parents meeting, she can meet with the parents as well...they’ll go in and talk through what the child has said they want to do vs what the parents want them to do.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, West Midlands**

### **AP case study – career service provision**

An example of APs taking a more proactive approach to the provision of careers information and advice is provided by this AP which recently introduced a mandatory afternoon session for Year 11s which their parents were also strongly encouraged to attend. As part of this session they organised a ‘market place’, where local colleges handed out materials and discussed applications with both students and parents. After this initial discussion they then took part in adult life skills workshops, covering areas such as making applications for apprenticeships and colleges.

## **Support provided to help achieve post-16 outcomes**

Once preferred post-16 destinations had been decided, support provided by teachers was focused on help with college applications, CV writing, interviews, and choosing the right FE college or apprenticeship provider. For pupils looking to progress into employment directly at 16, many AP teachers would contact employment agencies or employers on their behalf.

Specific confidence-building exercises were felt to be critical for many pupils looking to make successful post-16 transitions. Although sometimes delivered through external courses, most confidence building exercises were carried out internally. The most cited example was mock interviews designed to familiarise pupils with the concept of a job or college interview and to help tackle issues around self-confidence. Such exercises were

geared towards familiarising pupils with the processes they would encounter when making applications and were additional to the more general work that APs did with pupils to develop their self-esteem, communication skills and emotional resilience.

In some APs, teachers became personally involved in trying to help pupils achieve positive post-16 outcomes. One example was of a teacher helping a pupil with their army application by running with them after school, to ensure they reached the required fitness levels. In another AP, a head teacher who was unhappy with the selection procedure for a local college, developed her own form which she filled out and submitted alongside college applications. She felt that this gave a more balanced picture of each pupil and improved their chance of a positive destination.

One teacher summed up their AP's approach to supporting successful post-16 transition as one that was entirely dependent on the individual pupil. They were careful not to apply a set procedure, feeling that attitudes towards post-16 destinations differed dramatically amongst pupils. Some pupils were readily engaged with the post-16 process. On the other hand, some pupils struggled to engage with the concept of post-16 destinations, mainly because they disliked the idea of leaving the AP where they felt safe and secure. Pupils who were felt to require a more carefully planned approach to post-16 destinations included many SEMH pupils and those with wider SEND needs, especially autism. These groups were felt to be more likely to find the next step out of the AP daunting and were therefore identified as needing additional support in order to make an informed choice, to reduce the chances of dropping out.

*"I think young people who don't have social and emotional capabilities potentially struggle and need that relationship, someone to support them, quite often it will come down to confidence. Particularly those who have been in a smaller provision for some time, going onto a college can be massively daunting."*

**Director, independent AP, South East**

*"With our post-16 it's making sure they can make an informed choice themselves, so we visit ourselves, and look at training providers and colleges, and then we'll meet with them one-to-one and fill in the forms with them. They need to see the place in person rather than from a prospectus, especially for those with autism."*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, all-through, Midlands**

Some APs pointed out that this volume of individualised support provided to pupils was difficult to deliver on a sustained basis, especially once the pupils had left the AP and started college. Resource constraints meant that APs were limited in terms of the intensity of support they could provide once the pupil had left, and some were looking for additional funding routes to try to bolster the staff they had available for transition

support. Others with competing priorities and more limited budgets simply did not provide support to pupils, after they had left.

*"We've spent quite a lot of time with a very needy cohort of last year's Year 11, that we are still trying to do an arm's length support, even though we're not paid for it. I'd like to work with the college if we could secure some more funding and up our engagement team by one worker who's specifically dedicated to supporting Year 11 through the first part of college transition, to coordinate a lot of protective factors around that placement."*

**Headteacher, Secondary Pupil Referral Unit, South West**

*"Unfortunately, when they leave our provision here and go into college, we don't support them. We just don't have the capacity due to resources."*

**Headteacher, FE College, South East**

## **Work experience placements**

Secondary phase APs spoken to as part of the case studies typically felt that good quality work experience was highly beneficial in supporting effective post-16 transitions, as it prepared pupils for 'real life' and in many cases, helped to ameliorate loss of confidence issues that had occurred because of poor experiences in mainstream school. In addition, it was felt that – for some pupils – work-based training was a more appropriate destination than further education and work experience could in some cases open the door to this training. The duration of work experience placements varied widely. APs often have a vocational day set aside and work experience is a part of this.

## AP case study – work placements

One independent AP offered extended work experience placements with employers for pupils at risk of exclusion. The long-term placements were in external workplace settings and the AP also provided pupils with individual mentors. Pupils stayed registered with their mainstream school who retained responsibility for their academic education. The AP did not offer any qualifications and their focus was on using the work placements and mentoring to improve the pupils' emotional wellbeing, behaviour and attendance at mainstream schools and engage them with post-16 destinations,

*'Without us a lot would not get through the final few years [at school]. It saves them from being permanently excluded. They know they've got two days doing something they enjoy.'*

Pastoral teacher, independent AP, North

External work placements lasted around 12 months on average and typically were for 1-2 days a week. Pupils were placed in a variety of different organisations including garages, nurseries, salons and pet shops. Attendance was checked and reported back to the mainstream schools daily. Progress was reviewed initially after the first week and then every half term, with AP staff visiting the placement and asking the pupil and the employer to rate the pupil on a range of hard and soft skills. These reports were then sent to the mainstream school and to parents/carers.

Secondary APs usually had a designated member of staff, such as a vocational lead, who sourced work placements on behalf of pupils. Other APs worked with specialist organisations who helped source work placements. Typically, the careers advice team contacted employers on the pupil's behalf and placements were facilitated accordingly. A few APs reported that finding suitable placements was a challenge. Some placements were not successful, and alternative placements were required which would take time. That said, employers were typically regarded as tolerant of the pupils they took on as placement students from APs.

APs who felt they had a good track record of offering successful work experience described an approach that aligned work placements with the pupil's career plan and/or the vocational subjects they were undertaking. To engage pupils with the idea of working for employers and get them thinking about what they might like to do, one AP even distributed job adverts amongst pupils. Pupils were then asked to volunteer ideas of the sorts of employers they would like to work for and placements were found as a result.

Some APs were members of regional business and education partnerships. These partnerships provided opportunities for APs to create long-standing relationships with

local employers which provided APs with a better opportunity to offer good quality, long-term work placements e.g. one or two days a week over six-months.

## **Building links with local employers**

APs saw the benefit of building links with local employers and recognised the opportunity for these links to lead to work placements, apprenticeships and full-time employment. APs also used links with employers to ensure that work placements could be aligned with vocational courses, increasing the pupils' chances of obtaining a work-relevant qualification.

More generally, secondary AP headteachers saw the importance of links with local employers as providing an opportunity for pupils to feel part of the wider community. AP headteachers and other staff reported that the world of work could be daunting for pupils and very removed from their home life, which could be characterised by a high incidence of unemployment. With a key aim to prepare pupils for a successful post16 transition, many APs wanted to provide positive experiences for pupils of interacting with external businesses and employers. In this regard, the AP could be used as a safe refuge but also one which could prepare pupils for a life in work.

Career fairs, especially if hosted by the AP, provided valuable opportunities to create relationships with local employers. Other ways that APs looked to build employer links included asking local businesses for help and assistance. This included providing talks and practical sessions for pupils. One AP contacted a local bank who were keen to employ young people from the local area and invited them in to provide a 'moneywise' session for pupils.

## AP case study – creating links with employers

This case study provides an example of how APs could link with local businesses to add value to their vocational provision and build more long-term links. One AP had forged links with local employers through requesting help for vocational classes. Close by was a large manufacturing business whom the head teacher had contacted and requested that they donate some of their wooden pallets for use in construction/woodwork classes. In the same spirit, the head teacher had also contacted local garages for materials to aid practical classes on motor mechanics. To date, local garages had donated two cars and a motorbike, all in states of disrepair. In both cases, these donations had provided pupils with the opportunity to get more practical skills and hands-on experience from their vocational lessons. It also provided 'a way in' for the head teacher to invite representatives from these businesses to give talks, training and to provide work placements and apprenticeships.

## Pupil experience of careers advice in AP

In the case studies, most Year 10 and Year 11 pupils interviewed seemed satisfied with the careers advice on offer and described having ready access to a careers advisor who had helped them formulate career plans and prioritise necessary subjects and courses.

Many of the pupils were clear about what they wanted to do post-16, with most considering apprenticeships or moving on to FE colleges, and a few hoping to study A-levels and progress to university.

Pupils who had done work experience placements were largely happy with them, and felt they were aligned with the course/apprenticeship they intended to do post-16. Pupils also felt that AP staff members had helped them prepare for their post-16 transition through accompanying them to career fairs, events and college open days and providing help with applications and interviews.

*"I get the opportunity to work in a shop in town once a week. At my old school, work experience was just a one off."*

**Year 11 pupil, AP free school**

## **AP case study – pupils’ experience of careers advice**

One AP had a specific focus on making pupils employable. All pupils had mentors to provide advice about their post-16 steps. They also had close links with FE providers and employers. Pupils were very positive about the careers service and the support they got for their post-16 destination. Pupils also had good opportunities for work experience and help with applications for colleges/apprenticeships. Pupils liked the flexible approach to post-16 transitions. There was a strong emphasis on 'trying things out' and work experience was linked with what the pupil was interested in doing. Pupils felt supported in looking at a range of possible post-16 opportunities and didn't feel pushed into doing anything they didn't want to do.

Only a few pupils reported negative experiences. This was focused on the feeling that the AP were not doing enough to support their college application. One pupil described how teachers at one AP had consistently failed to send an EHCP plan onto the college. This was an important part of their application and by not supplying it on time, the AP was seen by the pupil as impeding their progress toward a positive destination.

## **Parents’ views on careers advice and post-16 destinations**

Parents interviewed in the case studies had more divided opinions on the careers advice provided at APs. On the one hand, many were happy with the provision and activities on offer and felt that the AP had worked hard to provide their child with a positive post-16 destination. Typically, this was through improving their confidence and any behavioural issues they may have had. Additionally, many felt that they had help to develop a vocational pathway post-16 which hadn't been on offer at their mainstream school.

On the other hand, there were some parents who were concerned about their child's chance of being able to progress onto college and university. In this regard, they felt that attendance at the AP had reduced their child's chances of progressing through a traditional academic route of A-levels followed by university. Parents' concerns were mainly due to the perceived focus of APs on vocational qualifications over more academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels. Some of them were also concerned about the more limited number and range of academic qualifications their children were able to do in the AP, compared with their mainstream school, for example being unable to continue studying History at GCSE level because the AP did not offer it (due to lack of demand among other pupils), or being unable to do GCSE Chemistry because of lack of the required laboratory facilities.

*“I just see the chances of him getting A-levels, going to university, getting a job that he wants as getting less and less.”*

**Parent of boy in Year 10, Pupil Referral Unit**

## **Post-16 destinations**

### **Typical destinations**

The case study APs identified a variety of post-16 transition routes, but the most common were moving into FE colleges or work-based training, with a minority of pupils going into sixth forms to do A-levels, into full-time employment, or becoming NEET. Most APs concentrated on supporting pupils to make positive transitions into post-16 vocational education, either in FE or by doing a traineeship or an apprenticeship. Underpinning this focus, is the consensus amongst staff at APs that the traditional classroom environment and academic curriculum were not universally suitable for this cohort of pupils.

*“It’s a shame, encouraging them to go back into the classroom when it’s this sort of (vocational) environment that works well for them.”*

**Headteacher, independent AP, secondary, North**

A few APs had pupils who were returning to their mainstream schools for sixth forms. In these cases, the AP was working with the schools to ensure that these pupils met the entry requirements. One AP had some concern as they felt that post-16 pupils may face similar issues of negative associations with their old schools as other, younger, pupils felt when transitioning back into their mainstream school.

A few APs also offered a post-16 programme for pupils, with one looking to start running a post-16 centre for the next year. These programmes were typically focused on traineeships and apprenticeships with a focus on functional and vocational skills and were designed for small numbers of pupils who might struggle in mainstream post-16 education.

Most APs had a good record for placing pupils successfully. This is testimony to the focus that many headteachers place on equipping their pupils for post-16 transition in the best way possible.

*“It is really important they come out with something of value to get them on the next step.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, North**

Under Raising the Participation Age (RPA<sup>15</sup>), at the end of Year 11 pupils need to either: stay in full-time education; enrol in work-based learning (such as an apprenticeship); or they can do full-time work or volunteering, alongside part-time training that leads to an accredited qualification. Many APs reported that pupils entered work at 16, although it is impossible to say what proportion of these was also engaged in part-time accredited training. In some cases, pupil involvement with local employers through work placements or careers events had precipitated a job opportunity. Other examples of employment destinations included pupils who had joined the armed forces directly after leaving the AP.

Whilst it was not the most common post-16 pathway, some pupils did follow a more traditional academic route after Year 11 and did A-levels in FE college or sixth form. Most APs had a small cohort of pupils (quoted by a few APs as roughly one in ten) who had moved on to study A-levels. A few APs also reported that some of their ex-pupils were currently in the process of applying for universities, although this was rare.

## Supporting pupils post-16

Case study APs were asked about the typical destinations of pupils who left at 16. They identified the most common post-16 transition routes as FE colleges or apprenticeships, with a minority going into sixth forms to do A-levels, or full-time employment. Most APs concentrated on supporting pupils to make positive transitions into post-16 vocational education, either in FE or by doing a traineeship or an apprenticeship. Underpinning this focus, was the consensus amongst staff at APs that the traditional classroom environment and academic curriculum were not universally suitable for this cohort of pupils.

*“It’s a shame, encouraging them to go back into the classroom when it’s this sort of (vocational) environment that works well for them.”*

**Headteacher, independent AP, secondary, North**

A few case study APs had pupils who were returning to their mainstream schools for sixth forms. In these cases, the APs were working with the schools to ensure that these pupils met the entry requirements for A-levels. A couple of the case study APs (one of them a medical PRU) had some concern as they felt that post-16 pupils may face similar issues of negative associations with their old schools as other, younger, pupils felt when transitioning back into their mainstream school.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-young-people/2010-to-2015-government-policy-young-people>

A small number of the case study APs offered a post-16 programme for pupils, with one looking to start running a post-16 centre for the next year. These programmes were typically focused on traineeships and apprenticeships with a focus on functional and vocational skills and were designed for small numbers of pupils who might struggle in mainstream post-16 education.

## **Sustaining post-16 outcomes**

Many APs reported that the figure for positive transitions tended to drop off when pupils were tracked at the 12 month point after leaving the AP. To give some indication of the scale of this issue, one AP reported that 96% of their former pupils were attending college or in employment in the September after they left, but this had reduced to 75% by January the next year. Another AP described how in previous years up to a third of pupils who had gained a place at the local sixth form did not – for whatever reason - take up that place in September.

Headteachers and AP staff found it difficult to determine a definitive answer as to why this was occurring. Headteachers were of the view that pupils tended to face many external pressures such as low household aspiration or criminal gang networks. Linked to this, some teachers felt that a significant proportion of pupils who left the AP still lacked the necessary resilience to cope with mainstream life. Some headteachers also pointed out that post-16 support provided for leavers was focused on the initial transition process i.e. the first term or six months. Once that support was stopped, these headteachers felt that many pupils began to struggle.

*“The pastoral team worker makes regular contact with them once they have moved but after January time, we then have to rely on the colleges or the training providers.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, all-through, South East**

From this we can determine that pupils were not leaving or ‘dropping out’ because they – or the AP - had made the wrong choice or they had been placed on the wrong path. The most likely reason for the high incidence in drop outs was that they found it difficult to cope in a FE college/work environment without the kind of support they were used to receiving at the AP.

*“Mostly with colleges they go from a very small school with a high level of support into a big place where they do not have the same sort of threshold in terms of support, and a lot of them will drop out because it so different to what they are used to.”*

**Headteacher, Pupil Referral Unit, all-through, South East**

It is worth examining the nature of support during the transition phase for pupils leaving at the end of Year 11. With FE colleges being the most likely destination for pupils, many

APs worked to build links with these institutions to allow for pastoral support to be put in place. Some APs had a package of support designed, which included such things as a report given to the college in the first week or so, highlighting specific support requirements for these pupils. Further to this, transition coordinators from the AP would provide regular visits during this initial phase to check in with pupils and ensure that they were engaged with the courses and not becoming overwhelmed.

Some APs looked to support pupils further. A good example was provided by one headteacher who had built up a support group of staff at the local FE College. This group would focus on pupils who had recently transferred post-16. Utilising this network, members of staff at the college would feedback to staff members at the AP on pupils who seemed at risk of dropping out. Working together, both sets of staff would put in place processes to support that pupil.

*“People at college will become aware of their needs e.g. any health issues. They will be flagged (by the AP) and someone in college will support them.”*

**Headteacher, independent AP, secondary, South East**

In a few cases, APs had also worked with colleges to help shape their pastoral care. AP staff had shared effective processes with relevant departments and these processes had then been implemented across the FE college.

### **AP case study – post-16 support**

One parent of a Year 11 pupil highlighted how the AP careers advisor, who was also a SEN teacher, had worked to set up her son’s first day at FE college. Her son had SEMH needs and was anxious about starting college, but this meant that he already knew, six months ahead, who would meet him at reception, where to go if he needed to talk to someone, and that he would have a ‘buddy’ looking out for him. This was immensely reassuring for him and for his parent. A key part of this had been that the careers advisor had helped the pupil and parent present his requirements to the college. This advisor had then worked with them and the college to put in place processes that could best support him.

However, APs across the board reported that FE colleges had been hit by funding issues and had reduced or cut some of the previous support they had in place which could have helped in the transition process.

*“That does now vary quite a bit depending on how badly hit the colleges have been hit in terms of funding. Their funding seems to have impacted quite heavily on what they can do in terms of support and I think that’s a mistake because colleges in the past had some really good ideas. There was at a local college for example there was a course that was specifically for people who had had mental health problems who needed to just go to something to get into the routine of going to college and the idea was that they would eventually go onto a course. And that was for 16-25 and that was just cut.”*

**Head of Education, Pupil Referral Unit, secondary, North**

Transition coordinators would also pay home visits to pupils who had moved elsewhere e.g. into full-time employment. Whilst effort was certainly made to stay in contact with these pupils, unlike with FE colleges there were no clear examples of how they worked with employers and training providers to put in place processes to support these young people to stay in work or training. The variety of potential destination routes reinforces the points made earlier about the need for more effective approaches to tracking pupil outcomes after leaving AP.

Some APs provided some good examples of how they could continue to support ex-pupils and maintain contact, but it is important to note that this was often done on a voluntary basis, or subsidised by the AP themselves, as they did not receive funding to support pupils once they had left at 16. Teachers recognised that APs represented a secure environment for their pupils. As such, many wanted to extend this sense of security outside of normal ‘opening hours’, and reported that bridging programmes across the summer could work well in terms of helping pupils prepare for college and reducing drop out rates.

### **AP case study – post-16 support**

One AP provided a programme of events over the summer holidays for those pupils who had recently left. They offered taster days about what to expect from FE colleges, apprenticeship and employers. They also maintained communications with pupils, sending them a series of text alerts about when courses were likely to start, or what employers would be expecting on their first day. After the summer programme was implemented the proportion of pupils from this AP who had dropped out of college after the first term fell significantly year on year.

*“We got volunteers and mentors to pick up kids during the summer and take them to taster days...we kept in contact with them reminding them when college starts...when we measured those who were sustaining their placement, it had increased to 82%.”*

**Headteacher, AP free school, secondary**

One AP also hosted social events and activities that were open to former pupils. Again, these were during the holidays and designed to allow pupils to stay in contact and have access to a safe place away from external pressures.

*“As long as the young people know there’s a route back in to us if they need it, that’s us happy.”*

**Headteacher, independent AP, secondary, North**

In summary, evidence from across the AP telephone interviews and case studies alike highlights the following factors in terms of facilitating and sustaining successful post-16 transitions into FE and other destinations. These need to be set in the context of funding and resource challenges that APs face, but the key elements are:

- **Providing individualised information advice and guidance** to pupils about their options at 16. For many pupils, this was more effective if it came from a familiar face or was delivered over a period of time, starting early in Year 11 or even Year 10, so that they could build trust and rapport with the advisor. Involving pupils in practical exercises such as mock interviews, inviting employers in to the AP and facilitating work experience, could all help to engage pupils in post-16 decision making and help them to build confidence. Some APs highlighted practical points such as encouraging pupils to make at least two college applications, so that they had a back-up.
- **Personalised support from the AP** in terms of accompanying pupils on college visits and interviews if needed, alongside extensive information-sharing and close working relationships between the AP and local colleges.
- **Bridging programmes** or other support/ contact with pupils over the summer, to keep up their engagement levels, continue preparing them for college, and help reduce drop out.
- **Sustained support** from the AP in the first term and beyond, if needed, to help pupils acclimatize to the college environment and to help resolve any issues that might arise. APs felt that having a familiar face was important to pupils during this initial stage of the transition. Where needed, APs felt that it was important that the college could put similar support in place, on a more long-term basis, but often this was limited by funding/ resource issues in the college.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions

Based on findings from this research, schools in the study considered AP for reasons which tended to focus on pupils' persistent behavioural issues. This was confirmed by the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), which, though finding no UK research specifically assessing the reasons for referrals to AP, found the most common reason given in the literature to be inappropriate behaviour. Other prevalent factors included pupils' mental health conditions and SEND issues such as ASD, and/or where schools felt unable to provide for a child's learning needs due to disengagement with the mainstream curriculum.

The REA identified strong evidence of two types of approach to preventing exclusion: changing the young person or changing the school. However, the REA found no comparisons of different student or school focused interventions, and therefore could make no judgements about the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of different approaches. In interviews with schools, their support strategies to prevent exclusion tended to focus on addressing poor behaviour rather than the root causes of this, where there were underlying issues. The research among AP providers, parents and pupils suggests that some mainstream schools have limited capability to identify or provide support to pupils with SEND, including SEMH issues, and mental health conditions. Schools themselves welcomed the support on offer from LAs in this regard but reported that it was difficult and/or slow to access in some areas due to resource constraints, and demand outstripping supply, an issue that was also identified in accompanying research into AP systems at area level<sup>16</sup>.

This research identified that taking a consistent approach to managing behaviour was a key characteristic of schools that were less likely to exclude or refer children to alternative provision. Some of these schools had developed effective strategies designed to manage behaviour including: offering alternative curricula, modelling positive behaviour, reward programmes, de-escalation techniques, mentoring and pupil code of conduct agreements.

When asked about opportunities for improving the sector, APs and schools alike mentioned better links and collaboration between AP providers and schools (and also between schools). For example, some AP providers felt that more joint-working would improve the system, with AP providers being able to provide schools with more specialist support with behaviour management and pastoral care, and mainstream schools offering

more specialist expertise to APs in terms of enabling them to offer a wider range of subjects.

It was also common for schools in the study to want better quality alternative provision locally (for example, a wider range of GCSEs to be offered in AP, better monitoring and evaluation, improved communication from AP providers, and better trained staff). Some specifically mentioned a need for a more rigorous inspection regime as experienced by mainstream schools, and some mentioned the need for improved leadership within AP. The issue of quality in AP was also addressed in the REA. This indicated that assessing quality can be difficult, as there are different opinions about what counts as good quality alternative provision. Some providers, for example, stress the importance of personal development as a path to academic attainment whilst others focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills and/or successful transitions back to mainstream school or into post-16 destinations.

When schools in the study were asked what could be done to improve the effectiveness of the AP system in their local area, responses very often focused on better funding. This was usually in relation to more places being available, and / or more diverse provision catering to younger age groups at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, pupils with mental health conditions, and offering more short-term placements, though sometimes it specifically related to more funding per pupil to help APs improve their effectiveness.

AP providers in this study considered that referrals to alternative provision work best where full information about the circumstances of the referral is disclosed upfront; where they are able to get comprehensive information on the pupil's background and prior attainment; where any SEND are identified already, or early in the process; where there is a gradual or phased introduction to the AP setting; and where the pupil's parents/ carers and mainstream school remain closely involved.

Overall, AP providers reported that the referral process was more effective where schools referred children directly to their settings, as typically happens for short-term placements. Referrals for permanent exclusions came through the LA, and in these cases, the providers reported receiving limited information about children's needs or backgrounds and there was no opportunity for a gradual induction process. AP providers mentioned however, that schools were also often 'incentivised' to permanently exclude children rather than send them to short-term placements, given that the former are often funded by the LA whereas schools themselves have to fund short-term placements.

In this study, both AP providers and schools mentioned that a clearer, easier process for referring to AP and better information about what AP is available locally would help to improve the sector.

Alternative provision is a diverse sector in terms of the range of pupils it caters for, the types of organisations delivering it, and what they offer (both curriculum-wise and in terms of the nature of their provision). This research found that, to cater for the diverse range of pupils, many APs in the study sought to balance their provision mix between core academic subjects and more vocational or arts-based provision. They considered it a challenge to get this balance right given the wide variety of different backgrounds, interests and abilities among their pupils. The diversity of the sector helps to address this, to an extent, but there were definite gaps in terms of scope for some pupils to do a wider range of GCSEs, and challenges in terms of being able to offer academic continuity for those who enter AP during Key Stage 4.

There was a mix of approaches in terms of how closely AP providers seek to mirror mainstream curricula, but generally this was regarded as important to support effective reintegration (particularly among younger pupils) and positive post-16 destinations (among older ones). In light of this, AP providers in this study recognised the importance of offering GCSEs, but they viewed offering Functional Skills in Mathematics and English as a good alternative for those pupils who were disengaged from the mainstream curriculum.

Consistent features that the APs participating in the research perceived to work well in supporting pupils were: small class sizes, a relatively high teacher to pupil ratio compared with mainstream schools, and intensive, one-to-one pastoral support to understand and tackle the underlying issues that pupils may have, for example through learning mentors or other key workers.

Once children were settled in AP, parents usually felt their child benefited from the smaller class sizes, fresh start, and more personalised support. Many of the pupils interviewed in the AP case studies were more positive about their experiences in AP compared to their mainstream school, for the same reasons. However, a key issue emerging from the research is the need for more effective working between partners across the education system to support pupils with the transitions into and out of AP (whether back into mainstream settings, or post-16 destinations). In particular, the case study interviews with parents suggest these are often stressful times, and not an area where they felt they had much information or influence. At the point of referral, many parents felt that the school could have done more to keep the pupil in mainstream education, and most of the parents interviewed would have preferred this at that time (except in cases where there was a recognised medical need).

Schools and AP providers in this research held similar views about what supports effective reintegration into the mainstream. This included good communication between the AP, the school, the pupil and the parent/carer, setting clear academic and behavioural targets for the pupil, phased (part-time) reintegration, and additional support and mentoring for (and monitoring of) the pupil. A key factor was the willingness of

mainstream schools to accommodate pupils back from AP, particularly in Key Stage 4. AP providers often felt that schools were reluctant to take back Key Stage 4 pupils as they were concerned about the negative impact this could have on the school's Progress 8 performance. AP providers also mentioned that they sometimes struggle to find mainstream schools who are willing to take children who have been excluded previously. For pupils who had been permanently excluded, sometimes by more than one school in the LA, there were often few schools available that they could potentially enrol with.

In terms of post-16 destinations, AP providers worked hard to support their former pupils but this was often reliant on individual staff keeping in touch with pupils, as there was no universal 'tracking' system in place to monitor destinations in the longer-term. This reinforces the need highlighted in the REA and in previous DfE research<sup>17</sup>, for more longitudinal data / research among pupils who leave AP, in order to identify and address their on-going support needs and evaluate what works in supporting them to make positive, sustained transitions into post-16 education and training. Whilst many AP providers in the study voluntarily opted to support children who had left their settings to make successful transitions, evidence suggests that many young people who leave AP still struggle to participate in education, training and employment compared to children in mainstream and special schools.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Tate, S. and Greatbatch, D. (2017) *Alternative Provision: Effective Practice and Post 16 Transition*. Department for Education. January 2017. Available at: [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>18</sup> 'In 2015, young people who ended Key Stage 4 in AP made up 2% of all children at this stage but 14% of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) at 16. Comparison with special and mainstream settings shows that young people leaving AP do considerably worse: in 2015/16 more than one in three young people aged 16 leaving AP did not sustain education, employment or training, compared to approximately one in twenty young people leaving special and mainstream schools.'  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/713665/Creating\\_opportunity\\_for\\_all\\_-\\_AP\\_roadmap.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713665/Creating_opportunity_for_all_-_AP_roadmap.pdf))

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## Appendix: Detailed methodology

### Overview of the methodology

In addition to a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), the research comprised primary data collection involving the following three components:

- 276 depth interviews conducted by telephone with Headteachers or other senior leaders in mainstream primary and secondary schools (Strand 1);
- 200 depth interviews conducted by telephone with Headteachers or their equivalents in AP (Strand 2); and
- Case studies among 25 AP providers (Strand 3).

We discuss each in turn.

### Telephone depth interviews with schools and APs

#### Sampling

The sample of schools and APs was drawn from the government's Get Information About Schools (GIAS) service. As not all independent APs are listed on GIAS, the AP sample was supplemented by manual searching for independent providers via the internet and publicly-available lists of AP providers published by local authorities. The sample was drawn to broadly reflect the population of schools and APs in England, and quotas were used to ensure feedback was gathered from a broad range of provider types.

Interviews with 276 different schools were conducted. A breakdown of the achieved interviews is shown in the tables below.

#### Achieved school telephone interviews by type of school and stage

Stage	Mainstream School	Special School	Total
Primary	80	3	83
Secondary	143	10	153
All-through	20	20	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>276</b>

### Achieved school telephone interviews by stage and region

Region	Primary	Secondary	All-through	Total
North	20	41	8	<b>69</b>
Midlands	38	45	12	<b>95</b>
South	18	44	11	<b>73</b>
London	7	23	9	<b>39</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>276</b>

### Achieved school telephone interviews by size of school

Size (No. of pupils)	Primary	Secondary	All-through	Total
< 100	17	11	11	<b>39</b>
100-199	22	5	9	<b>36</b>
200-299	19	6	3	<b>28</b>
300-399	8	4	1	<b>13</b>
400-499	11	12	2	<b>25</b>
500-749	5	33	3	<b>41</b>
750-999	0	29	2	<b>31</b>
1,000 +	1	43	6	<b>50</b>

The majority of school telephone interviews were with headteachers (156) or deputy headteachers (46). Other respondents interviewed commonly included Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), Inclusion Managers, Behavioural Leads, and Pastoral Leads.

A total of 200 telephone depth interviews were conducted with AP providers. A breakdown of the achieved interviews is shown in the tables below.

### Achieved AP telephone interviews

Alternative Provision Type	No. of interviews
Independent AP	73
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	65
AP Academy	25
FE colleges	21
AP Free School	15
Designated Hospital School	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>

### Achieved AP telephone interviews by stage and region

Region	All-through	Primary	Secondary	Total
North	14	3	49	66
Midland	13	4	43	60
South	27	1	23	51
London	4	2	17	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>200</b>

The majority of AP interviews were with headteachers or principals. The job roles of those interviewed is shown in the table below.

<b>Job title</b>	<b>No. of interviews</b>
Headteacher/ Principal / Director	144
Assistant or Deputy Headteacher/ Principal	9
Senior teacher / Coordinator	25
Other managerial positions	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>

## Fieldwork

Advance letters were sent to all schools and AP providers in the sample (a total of 1,500 schools and 670 alternative providers). Two weeks after letters were sent, telephone recruiters called schools and APs to schedule interviews. Fieldwork took place between Monday 29<sup>th</sup> January and Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018.

The telephone interviews used a semi-structured approach, with a mixture of closed and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions included prompts and probes to elicit more in-depth information than would have been available in a survey. Question areas are shown in the table below.

### School and AP telephone interviews: topic areas

<b>School interviews</b>	<b>AP interviews</b>
School demographics	AP demographics
Approaches to supporting pupils at risk of exclusion or off-site direction	Staffing and professional development
Referral processes	Referral processes
Use of AP, off-site direction and managed moves	Nature of the provision (e.g. subjects and qualifications offered)
Monitoring and quality assuring AP	Pupil progress and outcomes
Process for reintegration into mainstream school	Transition out of AP (re-integration into mainstream school and post-16 destinations)
Supply and demand of AP in the LA	Supply and demand of AP in the LA

The questions on supply and demand of AP in the LA were asked on behalf of ISOS Partnership, who were running a parallel study for the Department for Education. Participants were asked for their consent for data from these questions to be shared with ISOS Partnership.

Telephone interviews were undertaken using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) as this provides automated monitoring of the sample by different characteristics and logs the outcome of each phone call (refusal, respondent busy, interview booked, etc.), offering greater efficiency with the large sample. The telephone interviews lasted around 45 minutes for schools and an hour for AP providers, although the interview length for schools varied considerably depending on whether or not they had made use of AP.

After the first week of fieldwork, the questionnaires were reviewed for ease of understanding, length and flow. Following this review, both questionnaires were amended in order to reduce the interview length.

### **Analysis and reporting of telephone interviews**

Data from the telephone interviews with schools and APs was coded and tabulated. The tabulated excel file was used to initially explore patterns in responses, before individual codes and the underlying raw data was explored in more detail.

To avoid any misinterpretation of the findings as being statistically representative, they are not reported in precise percentages, but we have used broad fractions (such as 'around half') or terms like 'majority' to indicate prevalence within the sample, given the relatively large number of qualitative interviews.

## **Case studies**

### **Sampling**

The case study sample was drawn from the wider AP telephone sample. The case studies were purposively selected to provide a broad range of different types of AP, covering different phases of education, and regions across England.

## AP case studies

Alternative Provision Type	Total number of case study settings
Independent AP	8
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	8
AP Academy	3
FE College	3
AP Free School	2
Designated Hospital School	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

The AP case studies included interviews with 227 individuals across a range of primary, secondary and all-through (primary and secondary) settings. A breakdown of the interviews is shown in the table below.

## Composition of the case study interviews

Respondent	Independent	PRU	Academy	FE College	Hospital School	Free School	Total number of interviews
Pupils	31	19	9	12	8	8	<b>87</b>
Teachers	14	18	7	10	3	4	<b>56</b>
Parents	13	14	13	4	4	3	<b>51</b>
Senior Leaders	12	9	5	2	3	2	<b>33</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>227</b>

It should be noted that the research is qualitative in nature, and the sample structures were designed to provide sufficient breadth and depth of interview coverage by institution type, phase and region, rather than to provide a representative distribution. It is particularly notable that the schools sample over-represents secondary phase provision

compared to the national school profile, but is reflective of the fact that the vast majority of AP referrals are made at secondary level.

## Fieldwork

As with the sample for the telephone interviews, APs were sent an advance letter about the case studies and about the research more broadly, after which they were recruited by telephone. A £100 contribution to the AP was offered as an incentive. APs who took part in the telephone fieldwork were also offered to take part in the case studies. Of the 25 completed case studies, 12 had taken part in a telephone interview. Case study fieldwork took place between Monday 19<sup>th</sup> February and Monday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

Case study visits included face-to-face discussions with Headteachers and senior leaders, ranging from 45 minutes to an hour. It also included face-to-face discussions with staff, conducted either one-to-one or in small groups. Pupils were usually interviewed one-to-one, although some were interviewed in pairs or in small groups where the provider recommended this, usually because they felt the individuals would be more confident with fellow pupils. Interviews with parents were carried out either face-to-face or over the telephone. Parents were offered a £20 shopping voucher as a thank you for their time.

Pupils and parents were selected by the AP. AP providers were asked to select a cross section of pupils and parents, with different experiences and routes into the AP. It was not possible, however, to verify the extent to which the pupils and parents selected were representative for that provider. For parents, for example, some providers simply messaged all parents requesting participation, and handed over the names of those that wanted to take part.

The research team developed user-friendly information sheets and consent forms for parents and pupils in order to gain informed consent.

Efforts were made to make the research as inclusive as possible. Pupils could take part by themselves, with a friend or with a teacher, depending on what they felt most comfortable with. Parents were offered telephone interviews if coming to the AP provider on the day of the case study was not possible. In some cases, translators were offered where there was a language barrier to participation. Parental participation however, varied significantly. On average, two parents were interviewed per case study, but in six APs no parents took part. These were often smaller AP providers or those where parental engagement had been flagged as a challenge. In some cases, these were AP providers with a large proportion of parents who did not speak English, making communication with staff challenging. In other AP providers, pupils attended only part-time and parents therefore had limited engagement with staff.

## **Case study analysis and reporting**

Materials gathered during the case studies were entered into an Excel-based analysis framework. Findings from the case studies were synthesised with and reported alongside findings from the telephone interviews.



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