Alternative provision

The findings from Ofsted's three-year survey of schools' use of off-site alternative provision

Following Ofsted's 2011 survey and the subsequent Taylor review of alternative provision, the Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to carry out another survey of alternative provision, this time taking place over three years. This report is based on the findings of the inspections carried out over this time.

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Executive summary

In 2011, Ofsted published a survey about schools' use of off-site alternative provision[1]. Many of the findings were not positive. At that time, despite some pupils' evident enjoyment of their placements, and some very good work by some schools and providers, there were too many weaknesses in the use and quality of provision. Too many pupils were in unsuitable placements, were not paid enough attention by their schools and were not achieving as well as they should.

Following Ofsted's 2011 survey and the subsequent Taylor review of alternative provision,[2] the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to carry out another survey of alternative provision, this time taking place over three years. The survey was intended to find out whether the picture was improving. A report on the interim findings was published in July 2014. This report is about the findings from the whole three-year survey, during which inspectors visited 165 schools and 448 of the alternative providers they used.

So what has changed since 2011?[3]

In 2011, Ofsted recommended to the DfE that providers should be registered, and therefore inspected, if they provided more than one day's education a week to pupils. The Taylor review of alternative provision did not recommend further registration, but did note:

> 'At the moment there is no system for sanctioning or closing down an inadequate provider if it is too small to be covered by the DfE registration requirement and thus Ofsted's inspection remit. This means that children can be placed in inadequate or dangerous provision without there being any external monitoring.'

It remains the case that alternative providers that offer only part-time education and even those that provide full-time education to very small numbers of pupils[4] do not have to be registered. This remains a concern and means that pupils can spend all or the majority of their week at a placement that receives no external inspection or regulation. Schools are responsible for ensuring the quality of the placements to which they send their pupils. Most of the schools in this latest survey did assure the

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[1] *Alternative provision*, Ofsted, June 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-education-outside-school. Alternative provision can be defined as something in which a pupil participates as part of their regular timetable, away from the site of the school or the pupil referral unit where they are enrolled, and not led by school staff.

[2] *Improving alternative provision*, Department for Education, March 2012; www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-alternative-provision.

[3] It is not possible to make a direct comparison between the findings from the first survey and the findings from the current survey, as different schools have been visited. However, methodology and questions were very similar so valid conclusions may be reached.

[4] A provider of alternative provision should be registered as an independent school if it caters full-time for five or more pupils of compulsory school age; or one such pupil who is looked after or has a statement of special educational needs.

quality of the provision reasonably well, but there are risks involved in this situation, particularly as many of the pupils who attend alternative provision are the most vulnerable and disenfranchised in our education system.

Some providers in this survey were not registered even when they should have been. During the course of the survey, Her Majesty's Inspectors found 14 providers that were contravening the regulations about registration. This is a very worrying situation, particularly considering that the schools were sending some of their most vulnerable pupils to these placements, sometimes for five days a week.

Schools generally paid careful attention to the checks providers had carried out on their staff. However, there is no specific reference to off-site alternative provision in the government's latest guidance on safeguarding. This situation sometimes leaves schools uncertain about what is required and what would be considered to be good practice with regard to checks on alternative providers.

Other weaknesses also remain. The survey showed that some pupils were still missing out on English and mathematics teaching at school on the days when they attended their alternative provision, although the picture now is better than in 2011. There were substantial gaps in some pupils' timetables in almost a tenth of the schools visited, either with insufficient provision for English and mathematics, or timetables that were too narrowly focused on a very few activities across each week. When pupils do miss key subjects, they can find it very difficult to catch up. As a result, they often underachieve and do not gain the qualifications they should.

Pupils who attended alternative provision full time sometimes studied a very narrow range of subjects, and the English and mathematics qualifications they were enabled to take were only at a very low level. Occasionally these pupils did not receive a full-time education.

Too many schools lacked clarity about what constituted 'good progress' for their pupils who attended alternative provision. In some cases, individualised target setting led to a low level of challenge and low expectations of performance that were out of line with national expectations.

It remained the case that too few schools evaluated properly the quality of teaching that their pupils were receiving at the alternative provision. This hampered their ability to evaluate the quality of the provision effectively. Less than a third of the schools visited carried out any systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning at the placements they were using, either individually or in conjunction with the local authority or partnership.

Alternative providers were often not well informed enough about aspects such as child protection, the use of social media by pupils and general e-safety. Providers frequently encountered serious safeguarding concerns that they had to refer to schools. However, only a quarter of the providers had received any written information about child protection from schools. Very few had received any guidance

about e-safety, the safe use of social media or social networking. The majority of provider staff had not attended any formal child protection training.

The survey inspections carried out over the last three years did suggest, however, that despite the weaknesses highlighted above, many schools were using alternative provision in a more considered way than in 2011. The schools were largely paying careful attention to ensuring that the provision they selected was safe and suitable for their pupils. Many schools were working effectively together to find the best provision and to check it really was up to standard. The 2011 report noted that sometimes pupils who attended alternative provision were 'out of sight and out of mind' once they were at the provider. The schools in this survey were mainly paying proper attention to their pupils and taking responsibility for making sure they were doing well.

In 2011, very few of the schools surveyed were systematically tracking the impact of alternative provision on pupils' personal development and well-being. In contrast, almost half the schools visited for this survey were doing so. The planned pathway between alternative provision and continuing study at school, college, an apprenticeship or employment was clear in 85% of the schools visited. Schools that had discussed careers at an early stage with their pupils helped those pupils to show strong commitment to their education at the alternative provision. Pupils frequently valued alternative provision as an opportunity to make better-informed decisions about their future.

Many providers, keen to give pupils a good-quality experience and to be chosen by schools, commonly told inspectors they had taken note of Ofsted's 2011 findings and worked with schools to raise their standards. Equally, many schools had also taken note of the survey's findings, the subsequent interim report in 2014 and letters published on the Ofsted website as a result of survey inspections to neighbouring schools. Schools have used these findings to improve their use of alternative provision. Almost all the alternative providers visited during the survey were of a reasonable standard; some were excellent. It is encouraging that many schools and local authorities gave inspectors examples of where they had stopped using providers that were not good enough. Some schools had decided to use less off-site alternative provision, or not to use any at all.

Since 2011, Ofsted has changed considerably the way in which it inspects schools' use of alternative provision. Schools are now assessed during all section 5 inspections about how effectively they make sure that any alternative provision they use is safe for pupils and ensure that those pupils are making progress and behaving and attending well. Many schools have shown good improvements in this aspect of their work over time. However, Ofsted will continue to pay close attention to alternative provision as part of the inspection of schools under the 'Common inspection framework'.

Key findings

■ More schools appeared to be refusing to use provision they did not think was of a good enough standard. The schools visited were largely selecting alternative provision carefully to ensure that it was safe and suitable for their pupils. Where good quality provision was not available, some of the schools were developing in-house alternatives to off-site provision.

■ Some schools were still not taking enough responsibility for ensuring the suitability of the placements they set up. A few of the schools in the survey placed pupils at an off-site provider without having visited first to check its safety and suitability. Some schools did not check for themselves that the relevant safety standards were met.

■ A greater proportion of schools than in 2011 are now working in partnership with each other to find and commission alternative provision. At its best, this practice was seen to lead to a rigorous process for assuring the quality of the provision and rejecting anything that was not up to standard.

■ Providers were usually safe places with a reasonable quality of accommodation and resources. The best provision seen during the survey was of a very high standard. However, there was often a contrast between high-quality accommodation for vocational courses and classrooms unsuited to promoting high academic standards.

■ A small number of providers contravened regulations about registration. They were taking more than five pupils on a full-time basis when they should not have been doing so. Schools did not always check providers' registration status properly or at all, and still sent pupils to the provision.

■ Schools were generally sharing good quality and valuable information about individual pupils with the providers. This is a significant improvement on the situation in 2011. However, in the schools surveyed, sometimes the information about pupils' academic capabilities was insufficient and providers did not fully understand how to use it to support learning and promote achievement.

■ In a quarter of the schools surveyed, the curriculum for pupils who attended alternative provision on a part-time basis was too narrow. While that was an improving picture since 2011, it meant that these pupils did not have the opportunities they required to prepare them for their next steps in education or training. More positively, the vast majority of pupils who attended alternative provision were taking English and mathematics qualifications, usually at an appropriate level.

■ Occasionally, pupils whose alternative provision placements were theoretically 'full time' were not actually receiving a full-time education.

■ The vast majority of providers had carefully assessed the risks that pupils might encounter during their placements, either through the activity they were doing or through their own behaviour. The best practice was seen where schools and providers took joint responsibility for ensuring that good quality assessments of any risk were carried out. However, around 7% of providers had not had any

conversations with schools about potential risks or were unable to provide any evidence of the risk assessment processes to inspectors.

- All schools visited had appropriate procedures to check that pupils had arrived at the placement when they should, and to follow up any non-attendance.

- The overwhelming majority of pupils had positive comments to make about the provision, what they were learning, how well they were supported and the impact the provision was having on their behaviour, attitudes, attendance and outcomes at school.

Recommendations

School leaders should:

- check carefully the registration status of each provider they use and check whether they should be registered if they are not

- never use alternative provision that is contravening the regulations about registration

- ensure that they check whether staff at registered alternative provision have had the appropriate checks, for example Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks

- consider fully the potential risks involved in unregistered placements where no staff or not all staff have DBS or other relevant checks and act to minimise these

- discuss, agree and give to providers information **in writing** about social networking, the use of social media and e-safety, making the school's expectations clear

- give providers good quality information **in writing** about the school's expectations for child protection and procedures they should follow if they have a concern about a pupil

- support providers to access appropriate safeguarding training and information for providers

- systematically evaluate the quality of teaching and learning at the alternative provision they use, and the impact of this on pupils' progress towards the qualifications they are studying at their placements

- systematically evaluate the academic, personal and social progress being made by all pupils who attend alternative provision, ensuring that the targets set for academic progress are suitably challenging

- consider ways to track and evaluate the impact of alternative provision on pupils' employability skills

- ensure that governors understand the progress made by pupils who attend alternative provision so they can ensure that decisions made about value for money are well informed.

The DfE should:

- give schools clear guidance about how they can best check the safety and suitability of staff working in unregistered alternative provision
- strongly consider revising the threshold for providers to register as independent schools
- consider the findings of this survey alongside the recent government consultation about out-of-school education settings
- give Ofsted direct access, as necessary, to all alternative providers that take pupils of compulsory school age for six hours or more.

Ofsted will:

- continue to evaluate thoroughly the use of alternative provision in all section 5 inspections
- include a special focus on alternative provision in a proportion of inspections of secondary schools, to include visits to alternative providers.

Background

1. In 2011, Ofsted published a survey about schools' use of off-site alternative provision.[5] The DfE commissioned a further survey, which began in September 2012 and ended in July 2015. An interim report was published in July 2014 summarising the findings from the first year's survey inspections.[6] This report noted that the way in which schools commissioned and selected alternative provision appeared to be getting better. Similarly, the information and support schools gave to providers was improving. However, a number of weaknesses remained at that point, including the way in which providers reported information about pupils' progress to their schools, and the pupils' academic outcomes.

2. Alternative provision is commonly defined as education outside school, arranged by local authorities or schools themselves. For the purpose of Ofsted's 2011 survey and again for this latest three-year survey, alternative provision was defined as something in which a young person participates as part of their regular timetable, away from the site of the school or the pupil referral unit and not led by school staff. Schools can use such provision to try to prevent exclusions, or to re-engage pupils in their education. Pupil referral units are themselves a form of alternative provision, but many pupils who are on the roll of a pupil referral unit also attend additional forms of alternative provision off site.

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[5] [5] *Alternative provision*, Ofsted, June 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-education-outside-school.

[6] *Alternative provision: a report on the findings of the first year of a three-year survey*, Ofsted 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-a-report-on-the-findings-from-the-first-year-of-a-three-year-survey.

3. Alternative provision remains a largely uninspected and unregulated sector. Beyond pupil referral units and other full-time provision, there is no requirement for the majority of alternative providers to register with any official body and no formal arrangements to evaluate their quality. In some cases, pupils do not gain accredited qualifications during their placement, so results are often not available as a measure of quality either. Despite this lack of regulation and accountability, some pupils spend a significant proportion of their week away from their school or unit attending an alternative provision.

4. Alternative provision can be set up by the public, voluntary and private sectors. Some local authorities hold a database of provision that they have selected and that they believe to be of suitable quality for their schools and pupil referral units to use. However, this does not exist in all areas.

5. Each of the survey inspections had two parts. Inspectors first visited the selected school to evaluate how well the school had planned, commissioned, monitored and evaluated its alternative provision. Inspectors then selected a range of the providers used by the school and visited the pupils at each of these sites. This allowed inspectors both to evaluate how successfully the school managed its use of alternative provision, and to see first-hand how well the providers met the pupils' needs. This method gave inspectors a wealth of valuable evidence about how well pupils were kept safe, as well as how well they were achieving. During the three years of the survey, inspectors visited 165 schools[7] and 448 of the alternative providers that they used.

6. The schools visited were judged to be outstanding, good or requires improvement at their last section 5 inspection. In the initial telephone call to the selected schools, Ofsted established whether the school used any alternative provision. If none was used, no visit took place. Of the 417 schools initially contacted as part of this survey, 251 were identified as unsuitable.

Organising alternative provision

Finding and commissioning

7. In 2011, Ofsted's report on alternative provision noted that schools' arrangements for finding and commissioning alternative provision:

    'varied from being very centralised and formalised through the local authority, to very individualised arrangements using only their own contacts. Between these two extremes, some schools and units worked in partnership with others to find and set up their provision.'

    The findings from this current survey are similar. Methods ranged from a fully centralised system, where the local authority found and commissioned the

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[7] This includes maintained schools and academies and the six pupil referral units that were visited.

provision and placed the pupils through a selection 'panel', to schools working in isolation to find and commission their own provision.

8. Of the schools visited, 29% used only providers that were on the local authority's list or database of providers. Another 19% of schools used the local authority's list as well as finding and selecting their own providers or working with other schools to do so. Local authorities' lists of alternative providers sometimes comprised those that the authority had carefully selected and quality assured, as in the examples below.

> To be included on the list, this local authority had certain criteria that providers had to meet. For example, all placements had to have a strong focus on literacy and numeracy development, all courses must lead to accredited qualifications and appropriate checks on their premises must have been carried out. A local authority officer also checked providers' procedures for safeguarding and their arrangements for the health and safety aspects of the provision. These checks were repeated annually.
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> In a second local authority, the behaviour support service managed all the off-site alternative provision for the city. At the time of the survey, this involved 220 placements city-wide. The behaviour support service selected and commissioned providers, maintaining a service level agreement that included safeguarding requirements, hours to be provided, timings for the day, key skills to be developed and accreditation.
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> A third local authority provided a well-organised and effective alternative provision service that local schools could choose to buy into. In this case, the council team provided a tendering service for provider contracts carrying out all pre-placement health and safety and safeguarding checks. Regular visits were made to providers, including checks on the quality of teaching and learning, and requirements to report daily on attendance and at least once a term on pupils' progress were built into contracts. Termly meetings between providers and the local authority ensured that any problems were dealt with in a timely way. All schools and providers were clear about expectations and responsibilities with the result that very few placements failed.

9. Occasionally, local authorities were even more involved in the process, organising 'placement panels' to help schools select the right provision for their pupils.

10. In contrast, other authorities had a list of providers but played no part in checking the suitability or quality of those included, as illustrated below.

> In this authority, there was a website of providers in the area that schools could access. Minimum requirements were set that providers 'must' meet before they could be added to the website, but whether or not they actually met them was not formally checked by the local authority.

11. Importantly, schools were generally well aware of the processes that local authorities used in order to place a provider on its 'approved' list; they usually knew whether the list was simply for information, or if the providers had been quality assured. A few schools reported that the local authority had had a database of provision in the past, but that this had ceased. It was usually reported that this was because the local authority no longer had the resources to carry out the appropriate checks. Occasionally, databases of provision remained available, but schools were aware that the information was not up to date so had stopped using them.

12. The findings suggest that a greater proportion of schools appear to be working in partnership with each other to find and commission alternative provision than in our 2011 report. In 2011, 15% of schools used this method. Over the three years of the current survey, inspectors found that 20% of schools were working in partnerships with other schools for this purpose, sometimes also with others such as the local education business partnership. Some of these partnership arrangements were well developed, as the example below illustrates.

> Schools in this partnership could select from a menu of providers that the partnership had sourced. The website set up by the partnership provided a range of detailed information about the different provision available, from which schools could make informed choices. This included details of the accreditation offered by the provider and full quality assurance reports which the partnership updated annually.

13. The remaining 32% of schools surveyed sought and commissioned their own providers through research, word of mouth and information from other schools. Sometimes this was through choice. At other times, it was because they were not geographically close to other schools that they could easily form partnerships with, or their local authority had no database, or both.

14. Overall, schools showed a strong awareness of the need for placements to be good quality. Many schools gave inspectors examples of provision that they had stopped using, including providers that were sometimes on a local authority list, because they did not think they were good enough for their pupils. This is an encouraging sign of the growing understanding in schools that the provision used should be as good as anything that could be offered in school, not something convenient but inferior. Local authority officers also sometimes noted that a lack of quality had led to them not using certain providers. As one commented:

> 'The number of our approved providers has dropped considerably in recent years, because our procurement and selection processes are so much more rigorous. Some of the providers just weren't up to scratch.'

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Checking the safety and suitability of the placement

15. The DfE's alternative provision guidance[8] emphasises that, whoever sets up the placement originally, the school themselves still needs to take responsibility for ensuring that the provision 'offers high-quality education and is suitable for the pupil's individual needs.' In 2011, Ofsted reported that a sixth of the providers surveyed had not been visited by the school at all – either before or during the pupil's placement. This was a very concerning situation and two of Ofsted's recommendations were that schools should:

> 'ensure that they, or a leader within a partnership, have assessed the quality and suitability of all the providers they are using'

> and

> 'visit the pupils at their provision regularly and sufficiently frequently to ensure their well-being and progress.'

16. The evidence from the current survey indicates that schools are now taking their responsibilities for checking the suitability of the placement much more seriously. Of the 448 placements visited by inspectors, 92% had received a visit from school staff prior to the pupil starting their placement and another 3% had had a visit from someone else on behalf of the school, usually a partnership coordinator.

17. Despite this much-improved picture, it is still worrying that there are any schools at all that place pupils at an off-site provider without having visited that provider first to check its safety and suitability. Of the 5% of providers that had not received a visit from someone from the school, some already worked closely with the school. Although no one had visited in advance of the current pupil's placement, these providers felt that the school did have up-to-date knowledge of the provider's suitability. However, inspectors found that in a few of these cases, schools were either too ready to trust verbal assurances from providers that the relevant safety standards were met, or were too reliant on outdated lists compiled some time ago by local authorities. Four schools could not provide evidence that they had made any appropriate checks to assure the safety of some of the placements their pupils attended.

Sharing information about the pupils' needs

18. In 2011, Ofsted was critical of the format and quality of the information that schools gave to providers about the pupils' needs. A quarter of the schools in that survey gave only oral information to the providers. Even where the information was written, too many providers did not receive any information about the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, health needs or special

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[8] *Alternative provision* (page 11), DfE, January 2013.

educational needs, or specific behavioural difficulties. The evidence from the current survey suggests this aspect of schools' practice is now more effective.

19. Of the schools visited, 82% sent appropriate written information in the same format to all of the providers they used. These schools thereby took control of the process and ensured that the providers all received what the school saw as the most important information. Where providers needed additional information, for example related to the specific placement, the school would add this in writing or have a detailed conversation. Another 10% of schools also provided written information, but the format was that given to them by the provider. Consequently, the quantity and quality of this information was too variable because schools only gave the information requested by the different providers.

20. Where local authorities or partnerships of schools led the process of commissioning alternative provision, they had often developed a referral form or 'information passport' that the schools used. In the best cases, they took the lead in ensuring that the information provided by the school was of good quality, as described below.

> The partnership received the initial referral form from the school and checked that it was suitably detailed and appropriate. It was then forwarded to the provider. It comprised a detailed written profile of the pupil with information about their background, strategies that had previously been successfully employed in working with this pupil, their academic ability, any issues, behaviour, aptitude and interests. These profiles were seen during the inspection and were judged to be of an excellent quality – very detailed, clear and comprehensive.

21. Inspectors were largely positive about the information that they scrutinised because, unlike in 2011, this usually included clear descriptions of pupils' needs, including information about their academic performance and any learning difficulties they had. Inspectors did find, however, that providers were not always helped by schools to use the detailed information they were given. For example, schools sometimes gave detailed academic information that providers did not know how to use. Schools did not help them enough to understand how they needed to adapt tasks for pupils' special educational needs or literacy levels. Occasionally, a helpful personal statement from the pupil, outlining their own views of their needs and what they would like to achieve, was included.

22. Eight per cent of the schools only gave information to the providers orally, often missing out crucial aspects. This was a serious flaw in their arrangements for alternative provision. Where information was passed on in this way, there was a risk that it could be misinterpreted, lost or forgotten. Moreover, providers were then not able to pitch work at the right level, as illustrated in the example below.

The school provided basic information about the pupil at the first set-up meeting, but only orally. The providers were made aware of the pupils' career aspirations and the need to engage pupils actively. However, because no information was provided about pupils' literacy or mathematical skills, some of the assignments set by providers were not pitched at the right level. There were also missed opportunities for providers to build on pupils' strengths, for example in using information communication technology confidently. No targets were set or recorded, which lessened the impact of future monitoring visits by school staff.

Induction arrangements

23. Over the three years of the survey, schools and providers showed a growing awareness of the importance of good induction arrangements for pupils, to enable them to settle quickly into the provision and to see its value. Where schools and providers had thought carefully about this aspect, induction arrangements usually included providers, school staff, pupils and their parents or carers in some way. In around half of the schools visited, initial meetings at the provider that established clear expectations of all parties were a strength and contributed positively to pupils' commitment.

24. Not all induction arrangements involved parents or carers. The best examples of parental involvement included home visits or a meeting at school early on in the process to discuss the purpose of using an off-site provider. Parents and carers were given opportunities to discuss the options available and to ask about practicalities such as transport, clothing, health and safety, and eating arrangements. They were encouraged to visit the provider with the pupil beforehand during 'taster' sessions. A few of the schools reported that parents or carers visited again during the placement.

25. In the best examples, sessions that enabled pupils to sample different aspects of provision were also used to rehearse the unfamiliar journey to the provider, accompanied by school staff or a parent or carer. This contributed to pupils feeling safe and supported off site. In one school, pupils' familiarity with the idea of off-site provision had been nurtured by regularly inviting alternative providers to careers or option evenings. Opportunities to meet staff who provided alternative education, look at images showing the facilities and see examples of pupils' work completed off site, helped pupils plan for the experience. The providers involved reported a strong sense of involvement in pupils' wider education.

26. The most successful providers used taster sessions to learn about pupils' existing skills and knowledge and to discuss their career aspirations. Simple assessments that involved pupils in reflecting on their prior experience helped providers to pitch the starting points appropriately. One school encouraged pupils to participate in a range of taster sessions in order to make an informed choice about the most suitable placement available. In the best examples, initial

assessments were used as baselines and then regularly reviewed throughout the process.

> A provider of sports training based at a professional football club regularly reviewed with pupils their 'skills audit' that had been started on a preliminary visit. This process helped to review pupils' progress and to reshape the opportunities provided if necessary. By including personal skills of particular value to employers, pupils understood quickly the importance of qualities such as punctuality and initiative.

27. Effective induction was underpinned by clear communication between the school and provider. Information about pupils' progress and behaviour were two-way from the start. Regular visits by school staff helped to settle pupils quickly and to check that requirements were being met. Visits supported pupils' progress where the same member of staff visited, building a good working relationship in the process with the pupil and staff at the placement. However, in contrast, a small minority of schools left too much to pupils to deal with on their own, too early. This includes the seven schools that did not accompany pupils on their first visit to a provider and another 11 that visited pupils off site only if problems arose.

Achieving a balanced and appropriate curriculum

28. Overall, schools' planning of the curriculum for those attending alternative provision was better than that found in Ofsted's previous survey report in 2011. Then, issues were raised about too many pupils missing English and mathematics lessons, as well as other subjects, in order to attend their provision, and often finding it difficult to catch up. In 75% of schools visited for the current survey (124 schools), inspectors found that the curriculum offered to pupils attending alternative provision included English and mathematics courses leading to accreditation and was broad and balanced overall. In another 16% of schools, inspectors noted some lack of breadth or depth. Here, a few subjects gave way to alternative provision, but the core subjects were still being studied. However, worryingly, there were still substantial gaps in some pupils' timetables in almost 10%[9] of the schools visited (16 schools), either with insufficient provision for English and mathematics, or timetables that included these subjects but were too narrowly focused on a very few activities across each week.

29. In the best examples, alternative provision either ran alongside or incorporated core studies in English, mathematics and science, offered a range of vocational and academic options suited to a pupil's interests or aspirations, and ensured that pupils were able to participate fully in programmes of physical education, religious education, citizenship, and personal, social, health and economic education.

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[9] As percentages are rounded, the percentages given do not always add up to 100.

30. For pupils on part-time programmes, effective curriculum balance was achieved in many of the schools by alternative provision taking place on a day or on half days during each week that the school reserved for optional subjects. In some other schools, the alternative provision cohort went out to its placement at a common time and the pupils were taught English and mathematics as a discrete group on their return, so that no core lessons were missed. No concerns were expressed in this survey, as in the previous report in 2011, of a feeling of 'separation' and disaffection where pupils were taught separately in this way, as pupils were fully integrated with other pupils for other subjects.

> At one school, Year 11 pupils on alternative programmes attended providers for a whole day. Alternative provision appeared in the option blocks. The pupils missed one lesson of business and enterprise, and one of non-examination religious education. Additional opportunities to study these subjects were then arranged through tutorial work, themed assemblies and focus days. Senior leaders still felt that this situation could be improved, so they arranged for most of current Year 10 to attend their alternative provision for half days rather than a full day. This meant that they missed no other lessons. If pupils on alternative provision courses fell behind with any of their subjects, including those being studied on their alternative provision placements, they were invited to attend 'Period 6', an extra lesson beyond the end of the school day. Transport home was provided for pupils who attended this lesson.

31. Where small numbers of pupils from a school were involved in alternative provision, leaders were reluctant to design the timetable around this provision, so sometimes English and mathematics lessons were missed. These lessons were also likely to be missed in schools that tailored bespoke packages of alternative provision for individual pupils. In these cases, pupils went out of school on one or more different days depending on the provider's availability, but still took their English, mathematics and other academic courses at school.

32. The schools surveyed generally offered well-considered support for pupils to catch up on the content of studies missed. Typically, in the schools where pupils missed lessons, formal catch-up arrangements were in place. In around a third of the schools where catch-up was necessary, schools arranged for this to be delivered by specialist teachers as a means of assuring quality and accelerating progress. In other cases, this involved dedicated time set aside for pupils to receive help from mentors, teaching assistants or higher-level teaching assistants in the school's pastoral or learning support centres. A few pupils expressed concern about poor quality and lack of expertise from their helpers, especially in subjects that they already found difficult. However, many said that they valued the opportunity for close one-to-one or small-group attention, which they did not necessarily get in the mainstream classroom. In the best examples, teachers and leaders provided high-quality catch-up arrangements.

At one school, the success of alternative provision had a high profile and was a high priority for senior leaders. Leaders had carefully evaluated the curriculum and outcomes for pupils attending alternative provision. As a result, a tailored programme of catch-up provision for lessons missed had been developed. Any pupil who had missed part of the normal curriculum through attending alternative provision was part of the DESC (dedicated educational support centre). Here, pupils received subject-specific tuition for the lessons that they missed. All teaching and support in the DESC was provided by teachers, and senior teachers were allocated specific time for teaching there too, thereby giving it a high profile and ensuring that senior leaders knew the pupils well. Each pupil's academic progress and personal development was frequently reviewed by senior leaders. Heads of department remained responsible for the attainment of pupils on alternative provision even if they were not involved in all the teaching; so work was set and marked, and progress tracked by the relevant heads of department. As a result of this careful and rigorous approach, the majority of pupils made good progress.

33. Where catch-up arrangements were not provided directly by teachers, they were often provided by staff who were skilled in managing the pupils' behaviour and supporting their emotional needs. This type of support was most effective where the class teacher liaised closely with the member of support staff in providing work for the pupil and assessing work done in catch-up.

34. In 7% of the schools visited (11 schools), pupils missed lessons and no formal catch-up mechanisms were set in place, or it was the responsibility of the pupil to ensure that they kept up. The adverse impact of this approach was often clearly evident from the pupils' achievement data. However, these schools were overly focused on the benefits that they thought alternative provision could bring to pupils' personal development, rather than taking proper account of the poor academic outcomes and acting to improve them. These pupils felt they missed out on opportunities to improve their achievement in English or mathematics. While almost all of the pupils enjoyed their alternative provision, they spoke openly to inspectors about the negative impact they felt that missing lessons in school was having on their academic progress.

35. Inevitably, the inclusion of blocks of time for off-site alternative provision on a pupil's timetable meant that some other subjects that might normally feature at Key Stage 4 were squeezed out. This varied widely between schools but evidence indicated that alternative provision commonly replaced humanities, modern language or arts options. In a very small minority of instances, subjects important to the health and personal development of pupils, including physical education, religious education, citizenship and personal, social and health education were also missing from pupils' timetables. Provision that took account of shortcomings in pupils' timetables included focus days when the timetable was suspended.

One school planned very effectively to ensure that pupils did not miss out on important aspects of the broader curriculum as well as their usual subjects. The alternative provision group followed a separate curricular pathway, incorporating a mixture of alternative provision placements and time at school and college. No catch-up arrangement was necessary. Pupils took accredited courses in English, mathematics, science, computing, physical education in addition to 'Skills for life' and 'ASDAN' courses studied at college and through their alternative provision. The school made sure that key aspects of religious education and understanding of faith diversity were covered for pupils on alternative programmes through a planned programme of special focus days when the normal curriculum was suspended, and focused assemblies and tutorials. The 'Skills for life' course covered key elements of personal safety, including an understanding of terrorism and extremism.

36. Where pupils attended alternative provision on a full-time basis, providers generally ensured that pupils had a similar breadth of curriculum as they would in mainstream education. The curriculum was often supplemented with a range of counselling, advice and work-related experiences relevant to the needs of the pupils who often had some of the more complex and long-standing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Smaller providers often had links with mainstream schools to access specialist resources, such as science or technology rooms.

37. However, not all schools that commissioned full-time provision checked adequately on the quality of the curriculum on offer. In six of the schools visited where most or all pupils who attended alternative provision did so full time, inspectors found key shortcomings. In some cases, work was pitched at too low a level given the pupils' capabilities; in others the curriculum was very narrow, for example wholly focused on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, and missing out crucial subjects such as personal, social and health education, sex and relationships education and physical education. In another case, some pupils studied little or no English and mathematics. Here, they spent too little time in timetabled learning activities as the provider mainly offered the social activities of a youth club.

38. In a few schools across the sample, some pupils were not being provided with full-time education or training of 25 hours a week. They might typically have a short working day, or have whole days or sessions where they were not scheduled either for work in alternative provision or school. Occasionally, this was a planned approach to help re-engage pupils with a background of very poor attendance at school, with the aim of quickly building up learning time. In a very few cases, however, this was the way the pupil's curriculum had been designed to remain. Inspectors raised concerns with the schools about the implications of this for the safeguarding of pupils and for the quality of their education.

Safeguarding and health and safety

Schools' visits to providers

39. Ofsted's 2011 survey about alternative provision reported that:

> 'Once the pupil had begun their placement, the frequency of visits from the school or unit was variable. Eleven of the 61 providers had never received a visit from the school or unit responsible for making the placement. Another 13 were visited less than once every six months. Only 11 were visited weekly.'

The report recommended that schools should:

> 'visit the pupils at their provision regularly and sufficiently frequently to ensure their well-being and progress.'

40. Where schools did not visit the alternative provision they were using, they were reliant on second-hand information not only about essential aspects of safeguarding but also about the pupil's general welfare and progress. Some schools were still not taking sufficient responsibility for ensuring the suitability of the placements they set up. It is a concern that 5% of the 448 providers visited by inspectors as part of this survey reported that the school had not visited at all, including before the placement being set up. A very small number had visited in advance of the placement but not since. Of these, some had visits arranged for later in the term. The majority (70%) of providers reported that school staff visited their pupil at the placement at least once each term. Of these, a small number received at least weekly visits from school staff. This tended to be where the pupils had needs that are more complex and a greater need for support.

Assessing potential risks

41. Assessing potential risks for pupils, wherever they are learning, is an important part of safeguarding. Ofsted's safeguarding briefing for inspectors[10] notes that during section 5 inspections inspectors should consider whether:

> 'Leaders and staff make clear risk assessments and respond consistently to protect young babies, children and learners while enabling them to take age-appropriate and reasonable risks as part of their growth and development.'

42. The vast majority of the providers visited during the survey (92%) had risk assessments in place. In around half of these providers, 'risk assessment' was a

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[10] *Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills*, Ofsted, September 2015; www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-safeguarding-in-early-years-education-and-skills-from-september-2015.

process that involved discussions between the school and the provider to evaluate the potential risks for each pupil at the placement, prior to the pupil starting. This process enabled the school to tell the provider about the pupils' needs, including any behaviours or special educational needs that might be relevant. It also allowed the provider to consider these needs in the context of the placement, for example when using particular equipment or associating with members of the public. Following the discussion, a risk assessment summary was produced to show how these risks could be minimised.

43. In the other half of the providers that had risk assessments in place, these were more of a paper exercise than an effective, evaluative process. Risk assessment documents had usually been generated by the school or in some cases by the provider or the local authority, but there had not been any discussions between the school and provider prior to pupils' placements about whether the assessment was accurate or appropriate for each pupil.

44. Seven providers had discussed potential risks with schools but had not recorded these. As noted earlier, where important information was not recorded it could be forgotten or wrongly interpreted as it was passed on from one member of staff to another. Of greatest concern were the 6% of providers where there had been no conversations with schools about potential risks, or where providers were unable to provide any evidence of the risk assessment processes to inspectors.

45. The best practice was seen where schools and providers took joint responsibility for ensuring that good-quality risk assessments were carried out. Where providers did agree and discuss the risk assessments in advance, there were a number of strong elements as identified below. These were not all evident in each situation, but several were present in many of them.

- Detailed discussions were held between the school, provider, pupil and parent or carer in advance of the placement and at regular intervals throughout.
- Both the activity itself and the pupil in the context of the activity were assessed for risk and the specific risk assessment was agreed at the first meeting between the provider and the school.
- Risk assessments were completed by the provider and checked by the school.
- Frequent checks were made by the school, and the provider ensured that health and safety were a high priority when pupils were working on practical activities, such as car maintenance.
- Health and safety risks were taught as part of the induction process or as part of the course and risk assessments were adapted accordingly.
- Risk assessments included those associated with travelling to and from the provider.

46. Weaknesses included:

- generic rather than individual risk assessment
- established or historic relationships between the provider and school were deemed to be sufficient, so no risk assessments were carried out
- no systematic approach to risk assessment from the school – leaving it up to the provider
- the school failing to look at the risk assessments carried out by the provider
- little thought given to risks associated with certain aspects of a placement, for example those where pupils could mix freely with the public
- the school trusting providers or local authority to carry out risk assessments without checking this happened or relying on other agencies to carry these out
- the school assuming the provider would have a risk assessment process, but not checking
- the provider had expected the school to produce a risk assessment if needed and relied on them for this to happen
- a lack of visits and checks by school staff, despite having challenging pupils on placements.

Safeguarding checks on staff

47. Since Ofsted's survey in 2011 and over the course of this three-year survey, government guidance on safeguarding and on safeguarding pupils who are being educated off site has changed. At the time of the previous survey, and at the start of this survey, schools were still taking into account the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)'s guidance about safeguarding young people on work-related learning[11]. This guidance, which told schools which staff at a placement should have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB[12]) check, has since been archived and nothing as specific, relating to off-site provision, has replaced it. 'Regulated activity,' for which staff must have a disclosure and barring service (DBS) check is defined in the DfE's safeguarding guidance[13], which has been published twice during the course of this survey. This is the most relevant guidance for schools regarding checks on staff, but

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[11] Safeguarding young people on work related learning including work experience, DCSF 2010. This guidance said that schools should consider CRB checks for 'the employer' in the following cases 1) Pupils identified by the school as vulnerable for educational, medical, behavioural or home circumstance reasons. 2) Pupils on placements lasting more than 15 days over an extended time-frame, especially where these involve: regular lone working with an employer over long periods (i.e. anything over half a day at a time); placements located in particularly isolated environments; and placements involving a high degree of travelling. 3) Placements which include a residential element. It went on to say: But the fact that a particular placement falls into one of the above categories does not necessarily mean that the school should require a CRB check. Such a decision will depend on an assessment of the overall potential risks posed to a young person, and will take into account any systems in place to minimise these risks.

[12] Now Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS)

[13] *Keeping children safe in education*, Department for Education, April 2014, March 2015, July 2015; www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2.

there is no specific reference to off-site alternative provision. This situation sometimes leaves schools uncertain about what is required and what would be considered to be good practice with regard to checks on alternative providers.

48. Just over half of the providers reported to inspectors that schools had asked them to provide evidence of the checks they had made on staff. In the majority of other cases, the local authority had assessed in some way whether the provider's staff were suitably checked. In a few cases a third party, such as the local education business partnership, had scrutinised the checks that the provider had made on its staff.

49. Where providers were registered as independent schools or pupil referral units, and had been inspected, schools sometimes assumed that all the relevant checks had been made. While this was the case at the time of the inspection, it is important to bear in mind that, as already noted, it is the responsibility of the school sending the pupils to the alternative provision to assess the safety and suitability of the placement at the time.

50. In some workplaces, pupils sometimes came into contact, either during their work or at break times, with employees who had not had any kind of vetting or barring checks. At other placements, such as those based at gyms or community centres, pupils came into contact with members of the public. While some schools and providers had considered this aspect as part of their risk assessments, others had not.

Child protection

51. In order for providers to keep pupils safe, they need to have a good understanding of child protection procedures, to be alert to any concerns that may arise and to know what they should do if this happens. Nevertheless, only a quarter of providers in the survey had received any written information about child protection from the school sending the pupil. Sometimes, schools did not provide written information because the provider had their own policy, for example when they were registered as an independent school. In other cases, child protection procedures were 'set' for the provider by the local authority. Again, this highlights that schools sometimes delegated too much responsibility for their pupils to another organisation without ensuring that their own standards were met.

52. Only around one in ten of the providers had received full copies of the school's child protection policies. Others had received summaries or lists of advice, only some of which were useful and relevant. Occasionally, schools had carefully checked and accepted the placement's own policies and procedures, having judged that they were suitable for their pupils.

53. As noted previously, pupils attending alternative provision sometimes spend time with a number of adults, usually employees of the placement but also members of the public, which has the potential to make them vulnerable,

including through the inappropriate use of technology. Inspectors asked alternative providers what information they had been given about the use of social networking and whether schools had raised this issue or shared policies with them, for example whether employees should give mobile phone numbers to pupils. Only 7% (33) of the providers had had any information or discussion with schools about this aspect and of these, only one provider had received any clear written information.

> In this example, the school had given the provider its own child protection and safeguarding policy. The policy covered e-safety, social networking, and one-to-one working situations. All these elements, and their relevance to the placement, had been discussed and the provider was clear about the implications for their practice.

54. Some providers had their own clear policies for aspects of e-safety, such as the use of mobile phones. However, a small number of providers felt that they had encountered serious issues in relation to social media, for example they were concerned about cyberbullying occurring, and were occasionally alert to possible grooming taking place. Laptops used at alternative placements did not always have appropriate firewalls or filters to try to prevent pupils accessing inappropriate material.

55. Around one in ten providers had taken part in child protection training offered by the school, or by the local authority. Nearly a quarter had arranged their own training through the local authority or other agencies. However, the majority of providers had not undergone any formal child protection training.

56. Despite a lack of training and often a lack of any written information from schools, 94% (420) of the providers knew what action to take if they had any child protection or broader safeguarding concerns. Providers also knew who they should contact at the school. Most were positive about the support that they had received from schools when needed. A few providers had passed on crucial information to the school about a disclosure from a pupil or a serious concern. Though rarely reported, the examples below, all given by providers to inspectors, show the seriousness of some of the issues that arise when pupils are at alternative provision. These examples emphasise the importance of providers having a good understanding of child protection procedures.

> Issues around:
> - drug abuse
> - inappropriate use of texts
> - social networking, including possible grooming / sexual exploitation
> - risk of forced marriage
> - lack of attendance
> - panic attacks
> - mental health issues
> - dangerous behaviour with tools on a work placement.

Checking pupils' attendance

57. Robust procedures for checking if pupils are actually attending their placements each time they are supposed to are a crucial part of keeping them safe when they are off-site. All the schools visited had appropriate procedures to check that pupils had arrived at the placement when they should, and to follow up any non-attendance. Less than one-fifth of schools asked providers to record pupils' attendance through an electronic system, which also allowed wider communication between the school and the provider. There was generally clarity about whether the school or the placement would contact parents or carers if the pupil did not arrive at the agreed time. In the best examples, schools and providers also monitored pupils' punctuality and schools analysed attendance over time at placements carefully to see if any patterns of non-attendance emerged.

58. Very occasionally, schools were placing pupils in alternative provision for most of the week but not then having them back at school for the rest of the time. This is likely to contravene government guidance about the use of part-time timetables[14] and pupils' entitlement to a full-time education[15] and constitutes a potential safeguarding issue.

Helping pupils to keep themselves safe

59. The placement of pupils in off-site provision and outside the school's direct control of their safety and well-being necessarily carries a number of risks. Pupils, for example, may be working in industrial settings with unfamiliar processes and equipment governed by specific safety standards. They may be working with adults or pupils from other schools with whom they have to quickly forge constructive relationships. In some cases, pupils have to find their own way to placements and in some cases travel long distances by public transport. Given these easily recognised additional risks, the survey found surprisingly wide variations in the nature and quality of the work done by

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[14] *School attendance: departmental advice for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities*, Department for Education, October 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance.

[15] DfE's guidance, *Alternative provision*, 2013, states: 'While 'full-time' is not defined in law, pupils in alternative provision should receive the same amount of education as they would receive in a maintained school.'

schools to brief pupils in advance of a placement on how to keep themselves safe.

60. Just over half of the schools surveyed offered pupils comprehensive briefings or other activities related to how to keep safe in their placements before they went. In some of these schools, for example, pupils were asked to complete their own risk assessments of the activity, and from this discuss with staff any anxieties as well as their needs for specific training, equipment, resources, and additional information. A few schools ensured that pupils attending off-site alternative provision took accredited courses on preparation for working life to ensure that they were well prepared to understand the differences between school and the workplace. Nine schools in the sample brought staff in from the placements to brief pupils on workplace expectations and basic health and safety rules and practices before pupils started.

61. However, 21% of schools (35) relied wholly on the providers to brief pupils on site at the start of their placements on how to keep safe, without knowing first hand whether this was of sufficient quality. A further 20% of schools focused their attention almost solely on making sure that pupils, and in some cases their parents, knew who to contact if they had any concerns about their safeguarding and well-being. Pupils in these schools were sometimes not briefed at all by the school on wider aspects of working practices and workplace safety. Sometimes the named contacts pupils were given were readily available at the placement, either within the provider or as an attached or regularly visiting key worker from the school. However, in a few instances, the contacts were members of staff who rarely if ever visited the placement, so that any issues would generally be left for the pupil's return to school.

62. In three schools in the survey, some or all of the pupils were not briefed at all by the school on keeping themselves safe at the placement, or who to contact if in need. In one pupil referral unit, pupils did not know who to contact if worried and appeared to expect to rely on their own resources to solve problems. They did not expect staff to visit them on placement, or to talk to one another about their placement experience.

63. Well-managed provision ensured that placements were safe and that pupils were well prepared to keep themselves safe. Two examples are given below.

> The school had four staff who were trained to carry out the required risk assessments. This training was funded by the local authority when it was clear that they could no longer continue to carry out all the necessary functions related to alternative provision. The local authority recommended that schools quality assured: academic and vocational success; financial robustness; data protection; safeguarding; and health and safety. It also recommended that feedback from other users should be considered.

The school worked collaboratively with another local high school to prevent duplication of risk assessments and burden on providers. All alternative provision and work placements were thoroughly checked for health and safety and safeguarding each year. The local authority continued to do some pre-checks and this had resulted in the removal of two providers.

At a second school, pupils completed an application form on which they identified their strengths and weaknesses, fears and anxieties, and put together a personal risk assessment. This helped the school staff prepare them and overcome their concerns. Staff offered guidance and support to pupils so they could use public transport independently to reach their alternative providers.

The school prepared a booklet for pupils to use. This prompted them to look at websites, get the basic details of the alternative provider, plan journeys and think about appropriate dress. There were tips on making the right impression, listing the school's own expectations and the differences the pupil might encounter compared with school. There were 13 things to find out about the organisation, such as facilities, training and promotion, as well as a separate section on equal opportunities. Pupils used the booklet to reflect on their weekly experiences and gather information for their certificate of personal effectiveness.

The school provided pupils with all relevant safety equipment such as high visibility jackets, safety boots, hard hats, beauty salon uniforms and cases and hairdressing equipment, and staff monitored their correct use when they visited.

Assuring quality and impact

Monitoring learning and teaching

64. In the vast majority of schools, a suitably senior individual or team of staff was responsible for the oversight of alternative provision. In 62% of the surveyed schools, there was one senior or middle leader with overall responsibility for monitoring alternative provision. Many other schools shared the monitoring responsibilities between staff. In 33% of the schools, provision was monitored by a team comprising leaders such as heads of upper school and inclusion managers. Teaching assistants and learning mentors were often part of these teams, providing day to day oversight, as in the examples below. In the best examples, and where roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, this team approach enabled pupils to receive practical support while senior leaders continually challenged and evaluated.

In one school, the deputy headteacher, who was also the special educational needs coordinator, was responsible for the broad oversight of the alternative provision, including the organisation of the curriculum and ensuring that placements were suitable and safe. A behaviour and support manager was responsible for daily ongoing contact with the pupils and the placements. A work experience coordinator arranged appropriate careers guidance and extended work placements as needed.

In another school, an assistant principal in charge of pupil support organised and oversaw alternative provision. He reported to a vice principal who held the strategic overview. Each pupil had a key member of staff who monitored how well they were getting on at their alternative provision and visited them at their placements. In some instances, this was the pastoral manager. For pupils with a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan, it was the director of inclusion and for some other pupils it was the academy's education welfare officer. The choice of staff was carefully made to match the needs of individual pupils and their families, and all reported back to the assistant principal on a frequent basis.

In the remaining 5% of schools visited, the monitoring of alternative provision rested largely with non-teaching staff without senior leaders having sufficient oversight.

65. What the leaders and teams responsible for alternative provision actually did varied widely. Too few schools evaluated properly the quality of teaching and learning that their pupils were receiving at the alternative provision. This hampered their ability to evaluate the quality of the provision effectively. Where school staff visited providers, the visits usually focused on the pupil's welfare and how they were 'getting on' at the placement. Discussions usually took place with staff from the provider and with the pupil. However, only around a quarter of the providers reported that the member of staff from the school looked at the pupil's work or observed their learning.

66. Just under a third of the schools visited carried out any systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning at the placements they were using, either individually or in conjunction with the local authority or partnership. For the other two thirds of schools, inspectors identified the lack of such evaluation as an area for improvement for the school in the monitoring letters they wrote following the survey visits. Where monitoring of this aspect was effective, the methods were adapted according to the type of placement, but usually involved some formal observation of teaching sessions combined with a close scrutiny of pupils' work. An example of effective practice is given below.

One school carried out a thorough annual review of each provider it used. Observations of learning were always included in these reviews. These were rigorous. The observers looked carefully at pupils' work and considered their learning over time, including the development and

application of key skills, in order to make their judgements. The alternative provision providers, none of which were registered, valued the feedback they received and used this as evidence of their improvement or success in teaching, as well as driving future developments. For example, one provider visited as part of the survey pointed out the clarity of success criteria for different courses and lessons that he shared frequently with pupils and displayed in classrooms. This aspect of teaching had evidently improved following previous critical feedback. Another provider referred to how they had improved the quality of careers advice and guidance following feedback from monitoring visits.

67. Evaluation of the impact of the provision was most effective when it formed part of a school's regular evaluation cycle and where incisive questions were asked about the impact of alternative provision, in the same way as they were about other curriculum areas. Good examples of monitoring and evaluation processes were sometimes found in partnerships of schools, as shown below.

> Quality assurance and evaluation were a significant strength of the alternative provision in this school. All providers were reviewed annually by two people jointly, one from a secondary school in the partnership and another from the leadership team of the school placing the pupils. The feedback reports were clear and critical. If providers were assessed to not meet a good standard on any criteria, this became the focus of intensive monitoring until sufficient improvement was seen. If the provider did not improve in the following review, it was de-selected and no longer used by the partnership.

68. In 10% of the schools, evaluation was imprecise and of little use. In these schools where evaluation was very weak, they typically failed to carry out regular, sharply focused or recorded visits to providers and did not evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' outcomes. Evaluation was therefore largely based on anecdotal or second-hand evidence, as reported by one inspector, below.

> There has been no significant evaluation of the provision and the school has just started to review its effectiveness. The learning support officer has traditionally spoken to pupils, parents and providers to gauge how successful the placements have been but has not visited the placement. No formal evaluation of how effective providers are is undertaken.

Tracking personal and social skills

69. Following the survey of alternative provision in 2011, Ofsted noted:

> 'Surprisingly, given the needs of many of the pupils attending the alternative provision, behaviour and attitudes were not routinely monitored by many schools or units.'

70. In contrast, 43% of the schools visited for this three-year survey systematically tracked the impact of alternative provision on pupils' personal development and well-being. This included evaluation of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. For pupils who used alternative provision part time, this enabled schools to evaluate pupils' personal development off site and its impact in school. The picture was positive in both settings – for example, when pupils started to attend alternative provision, they often developed more positive and mature attitudes to learning and better relationships with adults and peers. However, sometimes the strengths that pupils were demonstrating off site were not capitalised on in school. For example, pupils who improved their contribution to teamwork through off-site activities often had little opportunity to apply these skills in school. Limited insight by schools into pupils' experiences off site, for example because they had not visited frequently enough or asked the provider for the right information, was a likely contributory factor.

71. Too often, the alternative providers themselves lacked systematic methods of monitoring and evaluating pupils' wider qualities and where they did, these did not match the systems used by schools. Equally, effective school systems of rewarding achievements out of the classroom were rarely shared with providers. As a consequence, pupils' successes off site were not always celebrated at school. However, some providers organised separate high-profile celebration events for pupils who had done well. These were valued by the pupils and the parents, carers and school staff who attended.

The role of governors

72. In two-fifths of the schools visited, governors received comprehensive and regular feedback about the effectiveness of alternative provision. This included information about the achievement of pupils as a result of their engagement in alternative provision. References to alternative provision in governors' minutes and headteachers' reports to governors included details about individual pupils and their performance at the different providers used. This contributed well to the school's quality assurance and the selective use of providers. However, in the remaining schools, half of leaders provided no reporting to governors about alternative provision and in the other half, the reporting to governors was limited to general information gathered as part of the whole-school monitoring of curriculum provision and outcomes. Governors most often received feedback on pupils' behaviour or attendance off site, particularly where they had been directly involved in meetings with parents with regard to these issues. Too often, however, governors were hampered in their monitoring of this aspect of the school's provision because the school themselves did not evaluate the outcomes for these pupils as a separate 'group', as they did for pupils with special educational needs or those in receipt of the pupil premium.

73. Governors' finance committees were often aware of the costs of alternative provision and evidently challenged school leaders about cost effectiveness. The rising trend of school-based provision was often influenced by governors' concerns about the increasing cost of suitably high-quality alternative provision.

However, the limited information provided for many governors about pupils' comparative achievement at school and off site meant that not all decisions were well informed. There were some examples of schools where governors clearly understood the importance of engaging pupils who used alternative provision in order to prepare them for further education and employment. These governors were keen to know more about this group of pupils and how their roles might help.

The quality of the accommodation

74. The accommodation and facilities used by alternative providers were fit for purpose in almost all of those visited. This was an improvement since the previous report. However, although very high-quality accommodation and facilities were seen in around a fifth of providers, a similar proportion had aspects that inspectors judged required some improvement.

75. Pupils were often able to use specialist resources that provided an authentic experience of the workplace. It was not uncommon for facilities providing training in skills such as hairdressing, motor maintenance, construction and child care to incorporate a functioning business. Pupils were able to learn by using industry standard equipment and by learning how to serve the public in a business setting. These providers had created a good balance between professional and educational environments.

76. High-quality accommodation in workspaces and classrooms helped pupils to respond well to established routines and high expectations. For example, individual work stations used to carry out research or apply learning about painting and decorating, plumbing or bricklaying, fostered pupils' independence. Where equipment or specialist clothing and footwear had to be stored systematically, pupils' learning about health and safety was reinforced on each occasion. Several providers had actively involved pupils in improving the environment.

77. Providers that pupils attended for academic, rather than vocational study often used buildings originally designed for an educational, albeit different, purpose, such as part of a former school. Most had been adapted successfully to provide classroom facilities suited to individual or small-group work. Any specialist subjects offered such as food technology, art and design or science were suitably equipped or additional facilities used elsewhere. Community facilities, for example, often supplemented provision for sports where there was no gym or outdoor space. Where accommodation was good, pupils were positive about the accommodation provided, valuing those environments that offered opportunities genuinely 'alternative' to those found at school. One pupil who attended a high-quality work-based provider commented:

> 'This is a working environment, so we know we have to act more mature here than we do at school'.

A pupil at another provider said:

> 'I learn by doing. I've had to develop more self-discipline. I am trustworthy because customers will need to trust me with their car. I'm enthusiastic about cars and this is a proper place, so it makes me motivated to learn.'

78. Where provision was not such good quality, pupils sometimes lacked a quiet space to complete tasks such as making notes or discussing their progress. Where study space was provided alongside practical facilities, there was sometimes a contrast between the two areas. Well-equipped and efficiently managed workshops sometimes existed alongside classrooms that did little to inspire or promote high standards. Occasionally, providers had thought particularly carefully about pupils' whole experience across the week, as in the example below.

> One provider had really taken this potential issue into account. The centre leader had visited schools using its alternative provision, looking carefully at work and leisure facilities, displays and resources to ensure that the learning environment off site complemented that found in schools.

79. In some cases, classrooms at alternative providers had outdated computer equipment and poorly presented displays that did not match the high quality of the facilities found at the pupils' schools. At times, providers had been set up in neglected commercial premises. These facilities were often much better than the poor first impression gained from the outside. However, the external appearance and sometimes their locations at the backs of industrial estates could form an intimidating introduction for some pupils, parents and carers. At some providers, there was a lack of secure and suitable outside space for recreation, something that pupils often minded. One pupil, for example, commented to the inspector who had visited him that he did not like having to 'sit around in classrooms at break and lunchtime' and felt that a recreation area was badly needed by the provider. Others expressed similar views where such facilities were not available.

Outcomes

80. Alternative provision can promote a range of positive outcomes for pupils, including getting them back on track when they have become disaffected with school. To maximise their chances of success when they leave school, these pupils, like any others, need to gain the best possible qualifications that they can in English, mathematics and a range of other relevant subjects, as well as developing their personal, social and employability skills. In the best examples in the survey, schools focused strongly on making sure that pupils were supported as well as possible in all these aspects, and not just to achieve well on their alternative provision courses. In the weakest examples, overall aspirations for pupils attending alternative provision were too low.

81. The sections below explain the findings from the survey about how well pupils attained and progressed academically, gained qualifications from their alternative provision and gained employability skills.

English and mathematics qualifications

82. Information about qualifications was collected from 146 of the 165 schools visited. This covered outcomes for 2,200 Year 11 pupils who had attended alternative provision in the academic year prior to the survey visit. These outcomes are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Proportion of pupils in the schools visited attending alternative provision who gained accreditation in English and mathematics

Qualifications	Proportion attaining each qualification (%)		
	2012/13 (58 schools)	2013/14 (57 schools)	2014/15 (50 schools)
GCSE English A*-C	21	17	19
GCSE English A*-G	69	85	76
GCSE Mathematics A*-C	24	19	17
GCSE Mathematics A*-G	69	84	**76**
English (other)	29	26	18
Mathematics (other)	27	21	15

Note: Direct comparison with the proportion attaining grades A* to C and A* to G in GCSE English and mathematics from July 2014 to July 2015 is not possible due to changes to examinations and rules regarding publication of performance data

83. Over the three-year period, almost three quarters of these pupils gained a GCSE qualification in English with the same proportion attaining a GCSE grade in mathematics. Almost half of the 2,200 pupils were successful in gaining a GCSE qualification in both English and mathematics. About one fifth attained a grade A* to C in one or both of these GCSEs.

84. About a quarter of pupils gained accreditation in qualifications other than GCSE in English, with a slightly smaller proportion in mathematics. These alternative qualifications were usually Functional Skills or Adult Literacy and Numeracy. Some of these pupils may have attained this qualification in addition to a GCSE in either subject.

85. Most schools ensured that pupils gained some accreditation in English and mathematics that was appropriate to the pupils' ability and needs. The examples below illustrate the range of strategies and courses used. While these strategies would not have been suitable for pupils who did not attend alternative provision, in the circumstances, they were appropriate and successful in helping the relatively small proportions of pupils who attended alternative provision to gain their qualifications.

- School A – pupils who were identified as being at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training post-16 (NEET) were entered for GCSE English and mathematics in Year 10, with a possible re-entry if unsuccessful

in the winter of Year 11, followed by summer of Year 11 if necessary. In the week prior to the examination, pupils attended school full-time for intensive support and revision.

- School B – a very small number of Year 11 pupils were 'triple entered' for a range of mathematics courses: GCSE mathematics, a mathematics entry level 3 course and a functional skills qualification in numeracy.

- School C – pupils were entered for GCSE English and mathematics courses in school and functional skills courses in literacy and numeracy through the alternative provider. Level 1 and level 2 functional skills courses were available to match the pupils' academic needs.

- School D – all pupils studied, and were entered for, GCSE mathematics, GCSE English language and GCSE English literature at school.

Academic progress from starting points

86. A question identified in the first year of the survey was whether examination results reflected the prior academic attainment of the pupils who took part in alternative provision. This aspect was therefore considered more closely in subsequent survey visits to see whether anything could be concluded about the progress these pupils made between Key Stages 2 and 4 and during their time at alternative provision.

87. About one fifth of the schools visited after the first year of the survey used national expectations of progress based on Key Stage 2 results in English and mathematics to evaluate how well pupils attending alternative provision had achieved, The schools defined 'good progress' as four or more levels of progress from the Key Stage 2 starting point, in line with national perspectives. This was the same criteria leaders in these schools used to evaluate the progress of all other pupils in the school. These schools therefore were able to see how well their pupils who attended alternative provision progressed compared with other groups in the school.

88. However, in the majority of schools visited, progress made by pupils taking part in alternative provision was evaluated in different ways from that typically used to measure progress for other pupils. This made it difficult for the schools to gain any realistic picture of the academic progress made by these pupils. The best approaches used by schools gave some recognition of the starting points of pupils, although in some cases this appeared to lead to a low level of challenge and low expectations of performance that were out of line with national expectations, as illustrated below.

- Using Key Stage 2 results as the starting points in English and mathematics (or the average of English and mathematics for other subjects), some schools defined 'good progress' for their pupils who attended alternative provision in terms that were lower than those expected of their peers.

- Sometimes, progress was measured just against the targets that had been set for individuals and expectations for the alternative provision pupils were too low. For example, both subject and alternative provision targets were set, often quite undemanding ones, and 'meeting target' was accepted as 'good progress', whereas for other pupils this would be the minimum expectation.

- Key Stage 4 targets were sometimes adjusted downwards by using the attainment level at the point of entry to the alternative provision, which for most pupils was their attainment at the end of Year 9, rather than using Key Stage 2 results as the starting point. This meant that where pupils had fallen behind during Key Stage 3, which many had, there was no expectation that using alternative provision would help to accelerate their progress and make up for lost time.

89. In the weakest approaches used to measure progress, schools took little account of any academic progress made based on pupils' capabilities.

- 'Good progress' in one school meant attaining a minimum grade C in GCSE subjects or a pass grade in vocational and work-related learning courses, irrespective of pupils' capabilities. This was flawed as it made no reference to the pupil's starting point. For some this may be outstanding progress, for others not enough.

- Improvements in attendance to lessons in English, mathematics or other subjects, or improvements in attitudes to learning in these subjects were considered by some schools as indicators of 'good progress', regardless of the academic progress made.

- Good behaviour, positive feedback from providers, improved motivation and engagement, or a readiness to return to mainstream education were seen by some schools or providers as a reliable indicator of 'good progress' being made. Often this took little or no account of pupils' actual achievement in their work. While the social, emotional and behavioural aspects are often crucial aspects for a pupil to improve, their academic achievement also matters in order to prepare them well for the next steps they need to take post-16.

Accreditation gained from alternative provision placements

90. Almost all alternative provision arranged by the schools surveyed led to some form of accreditation. In 83% of the schools all of the placements accredited pupils' alternative provision courses. In 17%, two or three pupils were not working towards a qualification because their individual placement did not involve accreditation. Very occasionally, alternative provision took the form of work experience and did not lead to any qualifications in addition to those already being taken by pupils at school. Placements with no accreditation tended to be used by schools when their aim was to help a pupil to reintegrate back into mainstream school where they had stopped attending or become very disaffected. In these instances, courses were aimed at building self-esteem and

self-confidence and often key aspects such as self-discipline and the ability to work positively with a range of people.

91. A range of qualifications was offered by the alternative provision placements. Pupils commonly pursued Level 1 and less frequently Level 2 vocational qualifications specialising in construction, motor vehicle maintenance, engineering, hair and beauty, hospitality and catering, food hygiene, travel and tourism, child care, health and social care, animal care, agriculture, land-based studies or media. The qualifications were closely linked to the specialist settings in which pupils were taught and often provided direct progression to local college courses post-16. However, a small but significant proportion of pupils were capable of progressing to Level 2 qualifications more quickly than they were able to do through their placements. The Level 1 qualifications these pupils were taking at alternative providers did not match the higher level they had been studying in subjects at school.

92. Providers used a range of basic skills awards to accredit pupils' achievements in literacy, numeracy, and ICT where they did not follow GCSE qualifications either at school or with alternative providers. However, unless they attended alternative provision full-time, most pupils took GCSE English and mathematics at school. Specialist awards schemes were used to recognise pupils' achievements in sports and the arts. Pupils' work with four alternative providers contributed to The Duke of Edinburgh Award or Prince's Trust Award. Other award schemes used included the St John's Young Life-Saver Award, John Muir Conservation Award and Diploma in Entry to the Uniformed Service. Other less-recognised accreditation was occasionally used to supplement more major awards.

Employability and skills for life

93. The planned pathway between alternative provision and continuing study at school, college, an apprenticeship or employment was clear in 85% of the schools visited. Where pupils showed strong commitment to alternative provision as a foundation for the next stage of their education, training or employment, it was clear that schools had discussed careers at an early stage. Although not all pupils progressed onto the courses or into the careers they had planned, pupils valued alternative provision as an opportunity to make more informed decisions about their future. In the best examples, pupils were encouraged to consider a wide variety of pathways linked to the accreditation gained while at alternative provision.

> In one school, 31 Year 11 pupils attended alternative provision, all of whom moved on to employment, education or training at the end of Year 11. This compared favourably to the figures for other pupils at the school. Similarly, 100% of the 41 pupils attending alternative provision at another school secured appropriate post-16 activity. It was notable that at both these schools, alternative provision for vocational qualifications was

offered as part of guided option choices, with appropriate accreditation and clear pathways to post-16 progression.

In another school, the next steps for pupils who attended alternative provision included apprenticeships and employment, college-based courses and the school's own sixth form, which offered vocational courses at Level 3. These potential steps were clear to pupils from the outset.

In a fourth school, alternative provision was part of a planned pathway for a small group of selected pupils. In this example, pupils moved from Level 1 certificates in Year 10 to Level 2 diplomas in Year 11 and thereafter on to specialist occupational qualifications, including apprenticeships.

94. More broadly, school leaders valued the emphasis that alternative provision placed on the personal skills required to succeed in employment. However, few systematically tracked and evaluated the impact that these skills actually had on the pupils being able to gain employment or go on to education and training. Very few of the schools visited made employability skills a specific focus of their tracking of pupils' progress. Although schools were usually confident that alternative provision minimised the proportion of school leavers not in education, training or employment (NEET), only around one in 10 were able to share evidence of how the skills pupils had gained had contributed directly to pupils' destinations. These schools were able to specify skills that other educational settings or employers valued highly. Examples included pupils who gained full-time employment through their alternative provision placement, and those whose improved interpersonal skills had clearly contributed well to their next steps.

95. At two alternative provision placements, the training was enhanced by adults who had themselves used alternative provision as pupils. They demonstrated well the interpersonal skills required to flourish after leaving school and were able to make these evident to the pupils. The example below illustrates a clear focus on employability skills from the outset and the subsequent impact on the outcomes for pupils.

This academy had a strong focus on progression pathways and careers education to ensure that pupils move to positive destinations. Alternative provision was deployed carefully and selectively to enable the most vulnerable pupils to realise their aspirations and future career goals.

Pupils who were at risk of not entering education, employment or training were identified early on. The academy operated a broad range of interventions as part of a structured programme on the academy site. In addition, commissioned off-site alternative provision was used for those pupils identified as most in need in order to shape and develop employability and work-related learning skills. For example, at the time of the survey inspection, a group of Year 10 girls were undertaking an employability skills placement. Although this was a course that did not

lead to a qualification, it was building pupils' self-esteem, confidence, communication skills and awareness of the world of work before they progressed to the next course on the placement, which was accredited. Pupils' experiences were enriched by a range of visits to employers and post-16 providers. Ongoing contact with parents and carers ensured that families were fully involved with and able to support this process. Pupils also had access to careers advice through the academy's commissioned careers advisor and the Connexions service. All pupils who attended alternative provision last year entered employment, education or training, and a number had progressed to post-16 areas of study related to their placements.

96. On the occasions where schools used alternative provision specifically to re-engage pupils in school, and no accreditation was offered, one of their other aims was to support pupils to gain employment, education or training at the end of school. Schools were frequently successful in this aim, and in many cases were able to demonstrate how alternative provision had been a turning point in re-engaging the pupil in learning. Nevertheless, many schools also had examples of individual pupils who they had been unable to place successfully at the end of school, and were now not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Pupils' views

97. The overwhelming majority of pupils had positive comments to make about their enjoyment of the provision, what they were learning, how well they were supported, and the impact the provision was having on their behaviour, attitudes, attendance and outcomes at school. Pupils spoke warmly about the impact attending an alternative provider had had on keeping them on track and in some cases preventing them from getting into serious trouble. They talked about how they had begun to develop confidence and ambition. Below are some examples of typical comments inspectors received from pupils.

Keeping students on track at school

'Coming here is something to look forward to.'

'It makes the week feel better.'

'I like the variety.'

'It releases some of the pressure… It's good to be doing something you enjoy…'

'Having the time away from school helps me concentrate more when I am there. I don't get excluded anymore.'

'It makes you feel better about yourself.'

'I feel refreshed and now I can do better in school.'

'It's hard to sit in lessons at school, but here I like the practical aspect of learning… then I can manage better in school too.'

'It is the best decision I made.'

Ambition and aspiration

'Someone believing that I could, has made the biggest difference.'

'I proved to myself I could do things.'

'This gave a taster of what I could do in college.'

'Before coming here I was on the road to nowhere.'

'I've got an understanding now of college life and the world of work.'

'I've had the opportunity to find out how it would be if you were on the job. And I like it.'

'The amount of trouble I've brung [sic] here, the amount of times Joe (manager) has taken me back because he knows coming here can help me with seeing my future.'

'I feel really pleased, without it (the provision) I would not have been able to make it this far. I feel like a new person.'

'It's picked me up and got me where I am. Now I have a future.'

Developing employability skills

'I have to act more maturely here because it is a working environment.'

'There is a lot of pressure from small group work and constant attention from adults – I can work much better with other people now.'

'I am developing skills and doing well.'

'I feel more responsible and my teachers are noticing this now too.'

'The tutors here are all professionals in their field so we learn loads.'

'We worked together in groups – learned to help each other. I came out with loads of friends from there.'

'I used to be shy. There we learned to speak to members of the public.'

'I really liked being in the smaller group. I changed my view of people.'

98. Pupils who attended alternative provision, however, did not always think it was the best thing for them or think that they were doing well. Individual pupils mentioned the following negative points about attending alternative provision. It is notable that the first three points were from pupils who were attending their provision full time, so not attending school with their peers at all. The last three points relate more to the pupils' perceptions of the support they were receiving from the school than the provision itself:

- feeling isolated

- missing out on physical education lessons

- nowhere to have a break outside

- no accreditation from the placement

- not having a real choice about attending alternative provision

- school not enquiring how they were doing since starting the placement

- school not telling the placement enough about their special needs

- no visits from school staff.

Developing alternatives to off-site provision

99. Many secondary schools do not use off-site alternative provision at all. Of the 417 schools initially contacted as part of this survey, 251 were identified as unsuitable for this survey. Of these, more than a quarter, when contacted, stated that they did not use any off-site alternative provision. A few of these had used alternative providers in the past, but were no longer doing so. Some schools had reduced their use of off-site providers by bringing provision 'in house' or were in the process of doing so and had only small numbers of pupils attending provision off site. This became increasingly evident towards the final year of the survey.

100. Many of the schools that inspectors did visit as part of the survey had reduced their use of off-site alternative provision due to their dissatisfaction with the range and quality of providers in the local area. In other cases, leaders and governors had rigorously reviewed the impact and effectiveness of off-site provision. The outcomes of these reviews had informed curriculum design and planning in the school itself. The reworked in-house provision became broader and more creative, and was then better able to meet the needs of all the pupils, thereby reducing the need to send pupils off site.

101. In the case of some of the schools visited, the need to improve outcomes related to behaviour and personal development, such as reducing the use of exclusions, had resulted in strengthened systems of pastoral support and more intensive early intervention with pupils who were identified at risk of disengagement. This led to pupils being supported more effectively in school and fewer ending up being seen as 'disaffected'. The schools' perceived need for alternative provision reduced accordingly. Other schools had actively sought

to improve attendance and behaviour by developing their curriculum offer so that it better suited the needs and interests of pupils who may be at risk of not succeeding. Some schools had for example, shifted from a largely academic subject offer, to more flexible and personalised pathways that included a broader range of practical or vocational subjects.

102. One school had set up a specialist inclusion centre on site and this was showing early signs of success. This centre formed a base for pupils, many of whom would previously have been sent out to different alternative provision placements, to undertake a more bespoke curriculum while receiving strong pastoral care and support from the school.

> As part of leaders' commitment to reducing rates of exclusion and the number of pupils not entering education, employment or training on leaving school, the school had established its own specialist inclusion centre. Pupils were taught a well-balanced academic and vocational curriculum that was adapted to suit pupils' abilities. This included core subjects, vocational subjects and a one-day per week work experience placement. There was a strong focus on careers education, citizenship and religious education. Pupils were taught in small groups by specialist teachers and spoke positively about the benefits of being taught in a small group in their dedicated base. The centre tutor was very effective in ensuring that pupils' academic and personal and social needs were met. As a result of this, leaders were able to demonstrate improvements in pupils' learning, attendance and behaviour.

103. Some schools were developing specialist work-based learning facilities on site to accommodate a school-based alternative provision offer.

> A bicycle repair workshop was run as a commercial business. Specialist instructors were brought to the school site. This gave pupils an authentic, well-structured educational experience of cycle maintenance and repairs, under the guidance of a well-qualified instructor. The school also involved off-site providers in an annual careers convention and in careers interviews with pupils. This enhanced partnership work and gave off-site providers a greater sense of contribution to pupils' education.
>
> Another school offered a broad range of on-site work-based experiences to promote pupils' engagement. This included engineering, through partnership with a major UK design and manufacturing company, opportunities to be involved in the combined cadet forces, an equestrian team, horticultural projects, including an orchid house, and a bicycle repair workshop. Governors were very clear that this unique and wide-ranging offer had reduced the need for the use of off-site provision.
>
> A lack of effective local off-site providers had led to another school forming a consortium with other local schools to establish a local free

104. The schools visited that had begun to operate their own version of alterative provision on-site were able to demonstrate a number of benefits. By bringing the alterative curriculum in house, the quality of delivery and tracking of outcomes were subject to the school's own monitoring and evaluation arrangements. This enabled leaders to have greater quality control of provision and overcome discrepancies that they had sometimes encountered before between the quality of information offered by different off-site providers. In one school visited for example, there was a discernible difference between the detailed tracking of improvements in the academic progress, attendance, behaviour and employability skills of pupils who attended the school's on-site alterative provision and that reported by off-site providers, which varied widely. Some schools were also able to demonstrate how adjustments to their own curriculum and stronger focus on early intervention were reducing the need for off-site provision. For many of these schools, off-site provision was viewed as a 'last resort' for the few pupils whose needs could not be met by resources in school.

Ofsted's inspection of alternative provision

105. At the time of the 2011 survey, schools' use of alternative provision was not evaluated in section 5 inspections. The survey recommended that:

> 'Ofsted should consider how best to evaluate, during section 5 and section 8 inspections, the appropriateness of alternative provision placements and the progress made by all pupils who attend alternative provision.'

106. In January 2012, Ofsted's new framework for school inspection required inspectors to evaluate how well schools used alternative provision, if relevant. This focus was strengthened in September 2012 in a revised version of the school inspection handbook. Inspectors received guidance and training on what to consider when looking at this aspect of schools' work, including the safety of pupils and how safe they feel when attending alternative provision.

107. In addition to the detailed feedback some schools have received as part of this three-year survey, the greater focus on alternative provision during routine inspection has helped to emphasise the importance of alternative provision being good quality and well monitored.

108. There is evidence that schools have made good use of the feedback they received during the alternative provision survey visits. Inspection reports for schools that have been re-inspected under section 5 since their survey visits frequently include positive comments about the organisation or impact of the provision, as illustrated in the examples below.

'Pupils who attend off-site provision make outstanding progress in their studies.'

'Those who attend off-site provision have seen distinct improvements in their attendance.'

'Pupils who attend alternative provision achieve well because they are motivated both to attend their courses or placements and to focus on their learning at school. School leaders ensure that they have the opportunity to succeed in English and mathematics to reduce any disadvantage.'

'Some pupils who have social and emotional difficulties benefit from effective alternative provision. Almost all go on to further education, training or work after Year 11.'

'The alternative provision for some older pupils makes a strong contribution to the achievement of the pupils involved.'

'The achievement of pupils who attend off-site provision is good. The provision helps them improve their work-based skills and potential employability.'

'Safeguarding has a high priority in school and with off-site providers. The designated safeguarding leader conscientiously ensures all requirements are met so that pupils are protected and staff are alert to potential dangers vulnerable pupils may face.'

'There is close liaison between the school and alternative education providers. This means that pupils who receive part of their education off site are routinely tracked and monitored. Their attendance is good; they behave well and make good progress.'

Unregistered providers

109. As Ofsted found in 2011, and during the first year of this survey, many of the providers were never inspected by Ofsted as they did not meet the criteria that would require them to register as an independent school or a pupil referral unit.[16] Several providers told inspectors that they were planning to register as an independent school so that they could expand their work with young people. This included, for example, to enable them to work with more young people with a statement or who are looked after, or to cater for pupils full time.

110. Throughout the survey, Her Majesty's Inspectors found schools that were sending their pupils to providers that should have been registered as

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[16] A provider of alternative provision should be registered as an independent school if it caters full-time for five or more pupils of compulsory school age; or one such pupil who is looked after or has a statement of special educational needs.

independent schools. Provision that should have been registered by a local authority as a pupil referral unit was also found. A common issue occurred where a school was sending only one pupil to a provider, or was sending pupils only part time, but had failed to check how many pupils from other schools were also attending the provider and on what basis. Schools too often assumed that the provider would have registered with the DfE if they needed to, but this was not always the case. Altogether, Ofsted referred 17 providers to the DfE following survey visits, 14 of which the DfE judged should have been registered as independent schools or pupil referral units. These have all since closed or undergone the appropriate registration procedures and, therefore, will be inspected in the future.

Research publications feedback

We are interested in finding out how useful you have found this publication.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or are you just interested? We would welcome your views and ideas. Complete our survey here.

Annex A: schools visited

Provider	Local authority
Abbey College, Ramsey	Cambridgeshire
Acklam Grange School A Specialist Technology College for Maths and Computing	Middlesbrough
Acton High School	Ealing
Addey and Stanhope School	Lewisham
Altwood CofE Secondary School	Windsor and Maidenhead
Archbishop Sancroft High	Norfolk
Astley Sports College and Community High School	Tameside
Avon Valley College	Wiltshire
Babington Community College	Leicester
Balshaws CE High School	Lancashire
Barclay School	Hertfordshire
Barnfield South Academy Luton	Luton
Barnhill Community High School	Hillingdon
Barr's Hill School and Community College	Coventry
Bay House School	Hampshire
Bedford Academy	Bedford Borough
Bedlingtonshire Community High School	Northumberland
Beechwood School	Slough
Benfield School	Newcastle upon Tyne
Bexleyheath Academy	Bexley
Bingley Grammar School	Bradford
Birley Community College	Sheffield
Bishop Douglass School Finchley	Barnet
Blandford School	Dorset
Bluecoat Academy	Nottingham
Bridgewater High School	Warrington
Buile Hill Visual Arts College	Salford
Cardinal Pole Catholic School	Hackney
Castle Community College	Kent
Cedars – Newcastle, Moorlands and Darwin Bases	Staffordshire
Challney High School for Boys and Community College	Luton
Chesterfield High School	Liverpool
Christ's College Finchley	Barnet
Churchill Community College	North Tyneside
Commonweal School	Swindon
Consett Academy	Durham
Coundon Court	Coventry
Cowley International College	St. Helens
Cranbury College	Reading
Crofton Academy	Wakefield
Dacorum Education Support Centre	Hertfordshire

Dawlish Community College	Devon
Denton Community College	Tameside
Derby Moor Community Sports College	Derby
Devizes School	Wiltshire
Droitwich Spa High School and Sixth Form Centre	Worcestershire
Elthorne Park High School	Ealing
Ercall Wood Technology College	Telford and Wrekin
Erith School	Bexley
Fernwood School	Nottingham
Fir Vale High	Sheffield
Firth Park Community Arts College	Sheffield
Fountain House	Kingston upon Hull, City of
Framwellgate School Durham	Durham
Freebrough Academy	Redcar and Cleveland
Greig City Academy	Haringey
Guilsborough School	Northamptonshire
Harlington Upper School	Central Bedfordshire
Harper Green School	Bolton
Harris Academy Bromley	Bromley
Hawkley Hall High School	Wigan
Heysham High School Sports College	Lancashire
Highcliffe School	Dorset
Highfields School	Derbyshire
Hinchingbrooke School	Cambridgeshire
Hodge Hill Sports and Enterprise College	Birmingham
John Ferneley College	Leicestershire
John Masefield High School	Herefordshire
John Whitgift Academy	North East Lincolnshire
King Edward VII Science and Sport College	Leicestershire
Landau Forte Academy, Amington	Staffordshire
Launceston College	Cornwall
Little Lever School	Bolton
Long Stratton High School	Norfolk
Lord Grey School	Milton Keynes
Maghull High School	Liverpool
Malcolm Arnold Academy	Northamptonshire
Malton School	North Yorkshire
Manchester Academy	Manchester
Manchester Secondary PRU	Manchester
Marple Hall School	Stockport
Marshalls Park School	Havering
Mount Carmel Roman Catholic High School, Hyndburn	Lancashire
Mount St Joseph: Business and Enterprise College	Bolton
North East Wolverhampton Academy	Wolverhampton
North Kesteven School	Lincolnshire
North Leamington School	Warwickshire

Northfleet School for Girls	Kent
Northumberland Park	Haringey
Nower Hill High School	Harrow
Orchard School Bristol	Bristol City of
Ormiston Bushfield Academy	Peterborough
Ormiston Horizon Academy	Stoke-on-Trent
Ormskirk School	Lancashire
Ossett Academy and Sixth Form College	Wakefield
Ounsdale High School	Staffordshire
Park House School	West Berkshire
Penryn College	Cornwall
Plumstead Manor School	Greenwich
Preston School Academy	Somerset
Prince Henry's High School	Worcestershire
Priory School	East Sussex
Ralph Thoresby School	Leeds
Rawlins Academy	Leicestershire
Ridgewood School	Doncaster
Rivington and Blackrod High School	Bolton
Rodborough Technology College	Surrey
Royton and Crompton School	Oldham
RSA Academy	Sandwell
Rushey Mead School	Leicester
Saffron Walden County High School	Essex
Saint Benedict Academy	Derby
Sale High School	Trafford
Sedgehill School	Lewisham
Shenley Academy	Birmingham
Shirley High School Performing Arts College	Croydon
Sir Bernard Lovell School	South Gloucestershire
South Shields Community School	South Tyneside
St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School	Bristol City of
St Edmund Campion Catholic School & Sixth Form Centre	Birmingham
St Joseph's Catholic College	Swindon
St Mary Magdalene Academy	Islington
St Peter's Catholic High School Visual Arts College	Wigan
St Thomas More Catholic School	Bedford Borough
Studley High School – A Humanities and Music College	Warwickshire
The Avon Valley School and Performing Arts College	Warwickshire
The Bankfield School	Halton
The Benjamin Britten High School	Suffolk
The Bulmershe School	Reading
The Bulwell Academy	Nottingham
The Causeway School	East Sussex
The Co-operative Academy of Manchester	Manchester

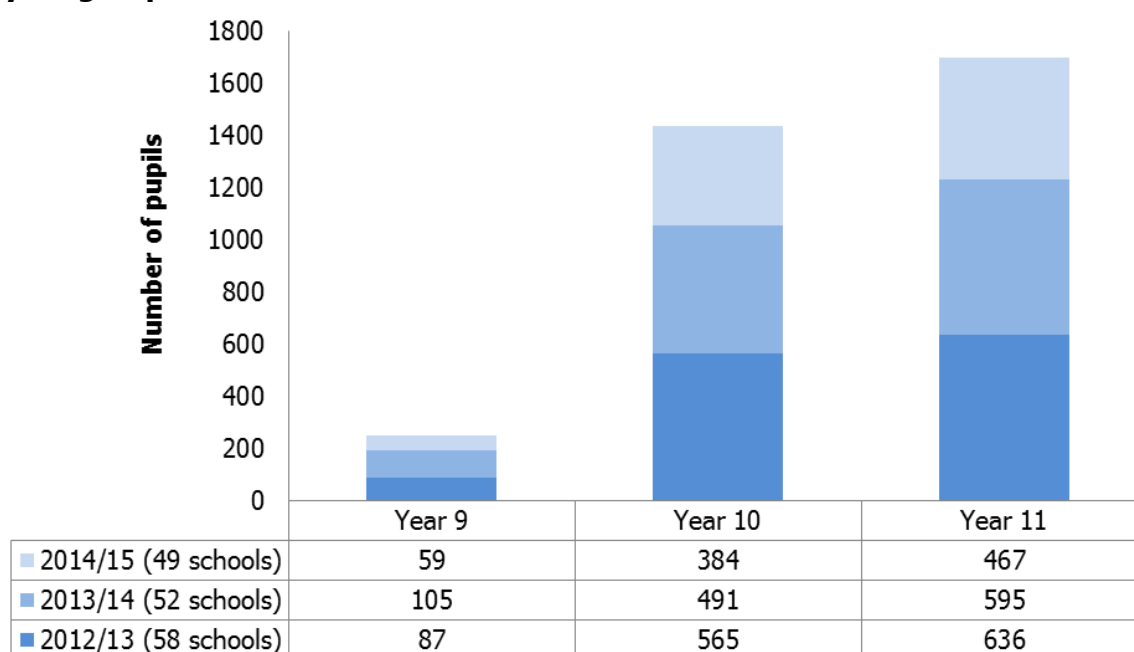| The de Ferrers Academy	Staffordshire
The Gilberd School	Essex
The Grange School	Buckinghamshire
The Hillcrest School and Community College	Dudley
The Holly Hall Academy	Dudley
The Hundred of Hoo School	Medway
The Lacon Childe School	Shropshire
The Lancaster School	Leicester
The Linden Centre, Farnborough	Hampshire
The Newark Academy	Nottinghamshire
The Open Academy	Norfolk
The Sydney Russell School	Barking and Dagenham
The Trafalgar School at Downton	Wiltshire
Thomas Tallis School	Greenwich
Tiverton High School	Devon
Trinity Academy, Halifax	Calderdale
Trinity Church of England School, Belvedere	Bexley
Tuxford Academy	Nottinghamshire
Upper Shirley High School	Southampton
Uppingham Community College	Rutland
Walworth Academy	Southwark
Wath Comprehensive School : A Language College	Rotherham
Weavers School	Northamptonshire
West Lakes Academy	Cumbria
Westminster Academy	Westminster
Wexham School	Slough
Whitecross Hereford; High School and Specialist Sports College	Herefordshire
Windsor Girls' School	Windsor and Maidenhead
Winterhill School	Rotherham
Woking High School	Surrey
Wood Green School	Oxfordshire
Writhlington School	Bath and North East Somerset
Yardleys School	Birmingham

Annex B:

The pupils involved

111. Across the 165 schools visited for this survey, a total of 3,849 pupils in Years 9 to 11 were attending alternative provision away from the site of their school for at least part of each week at the time of the survey visit.

112. Over the three years of the survey, overall numbers of pupils attending alternative provision fell from 1,288 in 2012/13 to 1,058 in 2014/15, although a sharp increase to 1,503 was seen from 2012/13 to 2013/14, at a time when there was a fall in the overall numbers of pupils in the schools surveyed. These differences may be down to variation in the samples selected for each year, rather than indicative of change across the sector in the use of alternative provision.

Figure 1: Number of pupils attending alternative provision in the schools visited, by year group

	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
2014/15 (49 schools)	59	384	467
2013/14 (52 schools)	105	491	595
2012/13 (58 schools)	87	565	636

113. Of the pupils on roll in Years 9 to 11 in the schools visited across the survey, 4% attended some form of alternative provision. This represents a fall compared with the figure of 7% at the time of Ofsted's previous survey in 2011. In the small number of pupil referral units visited, 60% of pupils spent at least some of their week attending an alternative off-site placement. This is a much higher proportion than in mainstream schools and also higher than the figure of 50% that was reported in 2011.

114. Of the 3,849 pupils in Years 9 to 11 attending alternative provision, just over 10% were identified by schools as having special educational needs and 35 pupils were looked after.

115. The numbers of pupils involved and the length of time they spent off site varied considerably from school to school. At one secondary school with 431 places in Years 9 to 11, for example, only one pupil attended alternative provision and this was on a full-time basis. In contrast, a similar-sized mainstream school with 426 places in Years 9 to 11 had 98 pupils attending alternative provision, the majority for one day each week. Some of the larger numbers of pupils attending off-site provision were seen in some of the pupil referral units visited where off-site provision was used to broaden and enhance the vocational curriculum for all pupils. The time pupils spend attending off-site alternative provision appears to be increasing. Placements varied in length from half a day to five days a week. The majority were for one day. However, over the course of the survey, inspectors saw an increase in the number of pupils who attended alternative provision for five days a week.

116. Information about the cost of alternative provision for the year prior to the visit and the current academic year was collected from 137 of the 165 schools visited. Almost £10 million had been spent by schools on funding places in alternative provision over the three-year period from September 2011 to July 2014. The cost of alternative provision in the six pupil referral units visited accounted for just over a quarter of this amount.

117. Over the three years of the survey, there was an increase in the amount spent by schools on alternative provision. In the first year of the survey, the total cost of alternative provision used by schools in the previous academic year (2011/12) was almost £2.4 million. A sharp increase in the total amount spent was then seen for 2012/13 to about £3.5 million, rising still further to just over £3.9 million for 2013/14.

Financial resources spent on off-site alternative provision in the year prior to the survey visit

	2011/12 (58 schools)	2012/13 (57 schools)	2013/14 (50 schools)
Total spend across all schools	£2,377,707	£3,487,261	£3,915,586
Average pupil spend per school	£2,536	£2,503	£3,217

Financial resources spent on off-site alternative provision in the year of the survey visit

	2012/13 (58 schools)	2013/14 (57 schools)	2014/15 (50 schools)
Average pupil spend per school	£2,336	£2,284	£3,178

Total spend of each school was not collected as this was not available at the time of the visits.

118. Schools visited had spent on average around £54,000 on alternative provision during the year prior to the survey inspection with amounts ranging from £1,000 to £280,000 depending on the number of pupils involved. The average amount spent by the six pupil referral units was significantly larger than other schools, at around £450,000, with amounts ranging from £46,000 for 57 pupils, to almost £1.8 million for provision for 148 pupils.

119. An overall increase in the average amount spent per pupil was seen over the survey period from about £2,536 in 2011/12 to £3,178 for the schools visited in 2014/15. However, most schools reported a reduction in the average amount spent per pupil currently taking part in alternative provision compared with the average amount spent in the previous academic year. There was considerable variation in the amount providers charged schools and pupil referral units visited depending on the number of part or whole days in attendance and the number of pupils involved.

The providers

120. As reported in the interim report for this survey in 2014, the type and make-up of the 448 providers visited varied widely. Providers included colleges, workplaces, charities, work-based learning providers, special schools and academies, free schools, independent schools, pupil referral units and units which were run by a group of local schools for pupils who were in danger of being excluded. Some catered for large numbers of pupils from many schools, others for very small numbers. Some had a very specific focus, others taught many of the subjects found in any school curriculum. There were providers that were part of a chain of providers, and very small one-off establishments.

121. These examples of providers were identified in the interim report and remain typical of the range of provision used by the schools visited during the full three years of the survey.

■ The organisation is a registered charity. Each pupil is offered between one and four days of extended work experience each week. Vocational courses are offered, from entry level to BTEC awards, and certificates and diplomas in a range of subjects. The organisation also provides core subject teaching from Entry Level to Level 2. There are 160 part-time pupils. The organisation caters for learners aged 14 to 16 from 41 different schools.

■ A registered charity set up an alternative provision centre. It works in partnership with several charities and local authorities and is intended to be an alternative to permanent exclusion. The work carried out focuses strongly on the sport of boxing.

■ A national chain of 'fitness academies' aimed at engaging young people in education through sport and fitness coaching qualifications. It is aimed at the 14 to 16 age range. The centre visited had 12 pupils on roll.

■ A small independently owned garage that specialises in car electronics; it is run by the owner and one employee. The garage caters for one pupil who attends for one day a week as part of an extended work placement.

■ A national education charity with centres across the country. The aim is to re-engage disaffected young people in learning and raising their self-esteem. The provision visited is small, with seven to eight pupils on roll, a centre manager and another tutor. The standard model is for pupils to be

on a 12-week programme for two days each week and at school for the rest of the time.

■ A charity-run training provider attached to a small local radio station. The provider trains presenters and also offers placements, especially for pupils who have issues with self-confidence and communication. Currently, five pupils attend part-time from different schools in the area – some for only half a day each week.

■ A farm is run as a community interest concern. It accepts 40 to 45 pupils each week from six schools. All are pupils aged 14 to 16 years. Up to 12 young people attend at any one time.

Bibliography

'Alternative provision', Ofsted, 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-education-outside-school.

'Alternative provision: a report on the findings of the first year of a three-year survey', Ofsted, 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-a-report-on-the-findings-from-the-first-year-of-a-three-year-survey.

Good practice case studies:

■ www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-quality-varied-alternative-education-provision-through-partnership

■ www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-quality-alternative-education-provision-through-a-consortium-of-schools

■ www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-student-aspirations

■ www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-high-quality-construction-skills-training.