



Department
for Education

Use of the code Other in Alternative Provision placement reasons

Research report

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Executive summary

The Department for Education (DfE) conducted this research to better understand the placement reasons provided by Local Authorities (LAs) and schools in our data collections when placing a pupil in alternative provision. At the time of publication, the second most common reason for placing a pupil in alternative provision is the code Other, by both schools and LAs. In this research, the term schools include mainstream, alternative provision and special schools.

Schools and LAs are asked to complete information about why alternative provision has been used to support a pupil. Schools complete the Alternative Provision Placement Section of the School Census¹, whilst Local Authorities complete the Alternative provision Census². Twenty-four per cent of pupils in school arranged AP in the School Census and 12% of local authority commissioned placements in the Alternative provision Census had the code Other selected as the reason for placing pupils in alternative provision.³ This is the second most common category in both sources. This research seeks to understand why the code Other is used as a placement reason, and how we can improve our data collection to better reflect the reasons that schools and local authorities have for placing a pupil in alternative provision.

Key Findings

The following findings relate to schools and LAs who took part in our survey and stated that they used the code Other as a placement reason for AP.

- For pupils who do not have an EHCP, the code Other is most used as a placement reason when AP is used for reengagement in learning (71%) and when AP is used for safeguarding reasons (28%).
- For pupils who do have an EHCP, the code Other is most used as a placement reason when parents wanted a specific type of provision for their child (26%) or when the AP was named on the EHCP (19%).
- 21% of respondents said that the code Other is used as a placement reason for pupils with an EHCP because of 'something else'. This included placing EHCP pupils into AP to better suit the pupil's needs, because the provision set out in the EHCP could not be fulfilled in the local area and because the school couldn't meet the pupil's needs amongst other reasons.

¹ School Census, [Complete the school census - GOV.UK](#)

² Alternative Provision Census, [Alternative provision census - GOV.UK](#)

³ Schools, pupils and their characteristics, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2024/25 - GOV.UK](#)

- 17% of respondents said that they use the code Other for AP referrals more now compared to the last five years. Reasons given included needs of pupils increasing, difficulties in meeting needs appropriately, mainstream schools struggling to meet pupil need, AP being used more now, numbers of AP spaces reducing and an increase in complex placements.

Background

What is Alternative provision and why is it used?

Alternative provision (AP) is a term used to describe education that takes place outside of mainstream and special schools. It acts as a safety net to help ensure children receive a suitable education. The department defines alternative provision in its AP statutory guidance⁴ to describe education for school-age children in England when arranged:

- by local authorities (LAs) for children who because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; and
- by schools for pupils who have been suspended; or who have been directed by their schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.

Local Authorities and schools typically arrange alternative provision in:

- i. state funded AP provision (AP academies and Pupil Referral Units) and;
- ii. non-state funded AP provision, which includes (registered) independent schools, non-school (unregistered) alternative provision settings, FE Colleges and Accredited online education provision⁵.

While DfE guidance outlines the formal definition of alternative provision, this research aims to explore the wider range of reasons why schools and local authorities choose to place pupils in AP.

Why the code Other is used in AP placements

When a pupil is placed in alternative provision, there are a list of codes which schools and local authorities can select to describe the reasons for the placement. The below list outlines the existing list of answer codes which can be given, depending on the setting.

For single-registered children education in state funded alternative provision schools, the alternative provision school is required to select one of the following reasons when filling out placement information.

Table 1. School Census placement reasons for single registered pupils receiving education in AP schools

⁴ AP statutory guidance, DfE, February 2025, [Alternative provision - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ Online education accreditation scheme, DfE, January 2023. [Online education accreditation scheme - How the scheme works](#)

Code	Description
ASP	awaiting an appropriate special school place
EHC	setting named on EHC plan
MHN	medical condition (mental health need)
NEW	new arrival without a school place
OTH	other
PEX	permanent exclusion
PHN	medical condition (physical health need)
RHE	returning to state education from elective home education

State funded schools can select one of the following reasons when placing a pupil in alternative provision. This includes where mainstream, APs and special schools may be placing a pupil in an alternative provision setting.

Table 2. School Census AP placement reasons arranged by schools

Code	Description
BHS	off-site placement for behavioural support
SUS	suspension
EXR	permanent exclusion (where still going through the review process)
MHN	medical condition (mental health need)
OTH	other
PHN	medical condition (physical health need)

When a local authority arranges an alternative provision placement for children not attending state funded provision, this information is collected in the Alternative Provision Census. Below are the reasons that LAs can currently select when placing a pupil in alternative provision.

Table 3. Alternative Provision placement reasons arranged by LA in AP Census

Code	Description
EHC	setting named on EHC plan
MHN	mental health need
NEW	new arrival without a school place
OTH	other
PCC	pregnancy or childcare
PEX	permanent exclusion
PHN	physical health need
YOI	pupil in young offender institutions or secure training centres

The findings of this research will outline why, in all instances, schools and LAs are using the placement reason Other, when placing a pupil in alternative provision.

Methodology

A sample of schools, colleges and local authorities who use the code Other as a referral reason to place pupils in alternative provision was drawn from the School Census and Alternative Provision Census.

The sample was sent unique links to complete a short survey which asked questions about the placement reason codes used when placing a pupil in alternative provision. The survey ran from 2nd July to 15th August 2025, and we had 110 responses from a combination of alternative provision schools, special schools, mainstream schools, local authorities and colleges. Although our target respondents were schools and LAs, we did receive 2 responses from colleges.

Table 4. Survey respondent breakdown

Respondent group	Number	Percentage
Mainstream school	48	43.6%
Local authority	38	34.5%
Alternative provision school	17	15.5%
Special school	5	4.5%
FE College	2	1.8%

Our core research questions for this project were:

1. What are the reasons that local authorities and schools are using the code 'other' when placing pupils in alternative provision?
2. Should additional codes be added to the AP Census or School Census to capture all possible reasons for placement?

The survey software Qualtrics was used to securely send individual links to our survey. Our software included bot detection and Captcha technology to verify responses. This, combined with individual closed links, results in a high level of confidence in the authenticity of our responses.

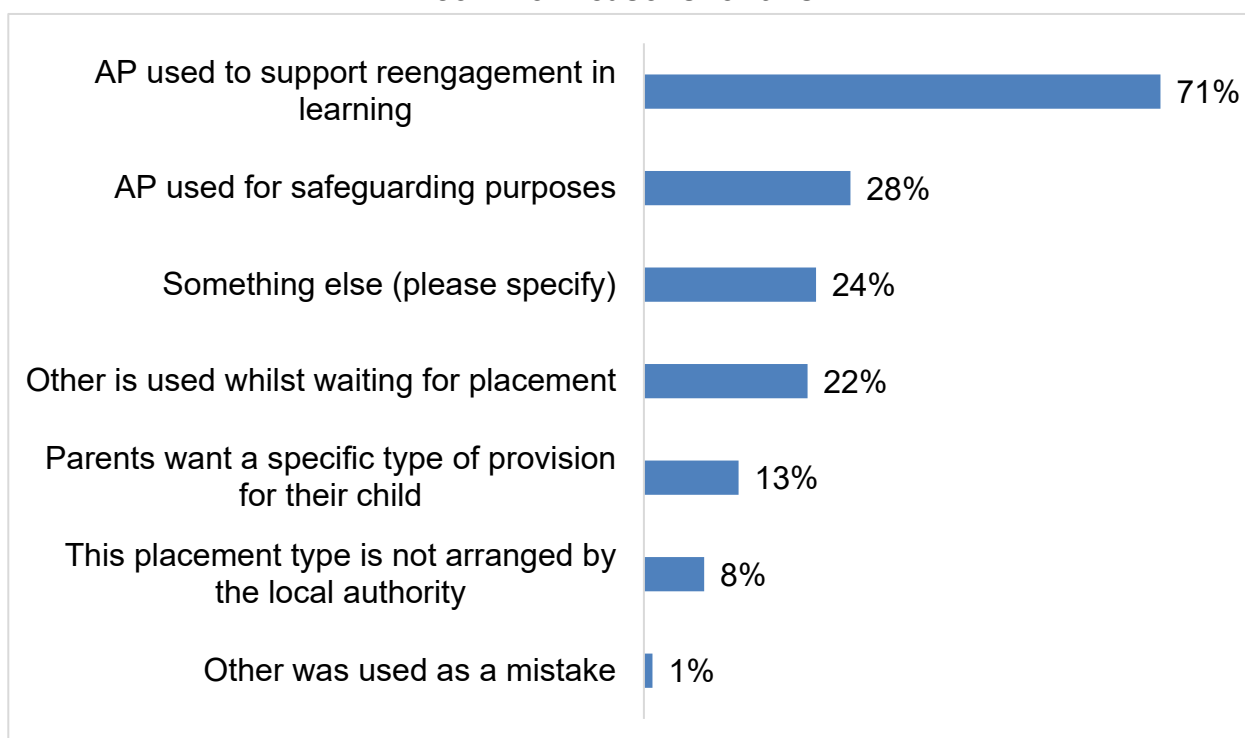
Findings

Though our survey was for schools and local authorities, some questions were only applicable for certain respondent groups. The following questions on AP placement reasons for those with and without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) were asked to all respondents.

Pupils who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

When asked why the code Other is used when placing a pupil in alternative provision for pupils who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the most common answer was that the provision was being used to support reengagement in learning (71%, Figure 1). The Other placement reason code was also selected when AP was used for safeguarding purposes (28%), whilst waiting for placement (22%) and when parents wanted a specific type of provision for their child (13%).

Figure 1. When the code Other is ticked as a reason for placing a pupil in AP who does not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), what are the most common reasons for this?

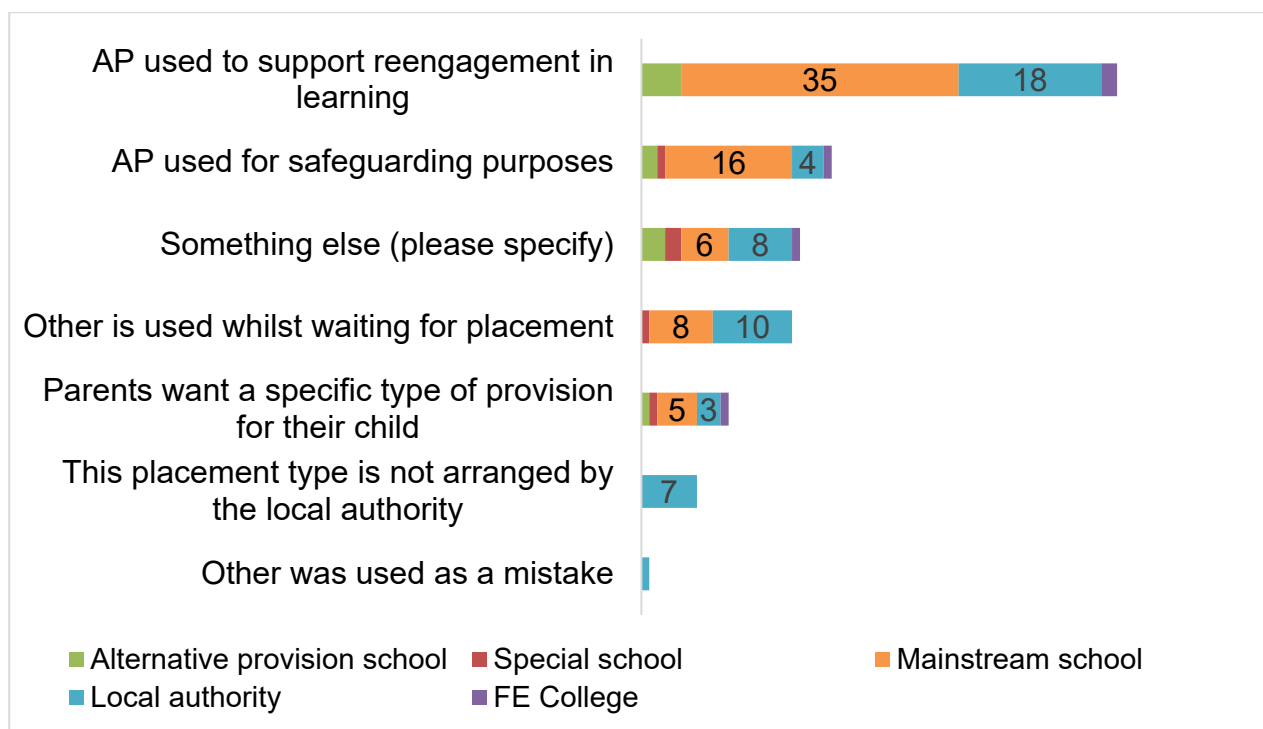


Base = 85. This question allowed multiple answers and will not sum to 100%.

The most common answers for local authorities were that the code was used when AP was used to support reengagement in learning or where a pupil was waiting for a

placement, whereas mainstream schools were most likely to use AP for safeguarding purposes after reengagement in learning (Figure 2).

Figure 2. When the code Other is ticked as a reason for placing a pupil in AP who does not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), what are the most common reasons for this? Count by respondent type.



Base = 85. Mainstream schools = 45, local authority = 29, alternative provision school = 9, special school = 4, FE college = 2. This question allowed multiple responses.

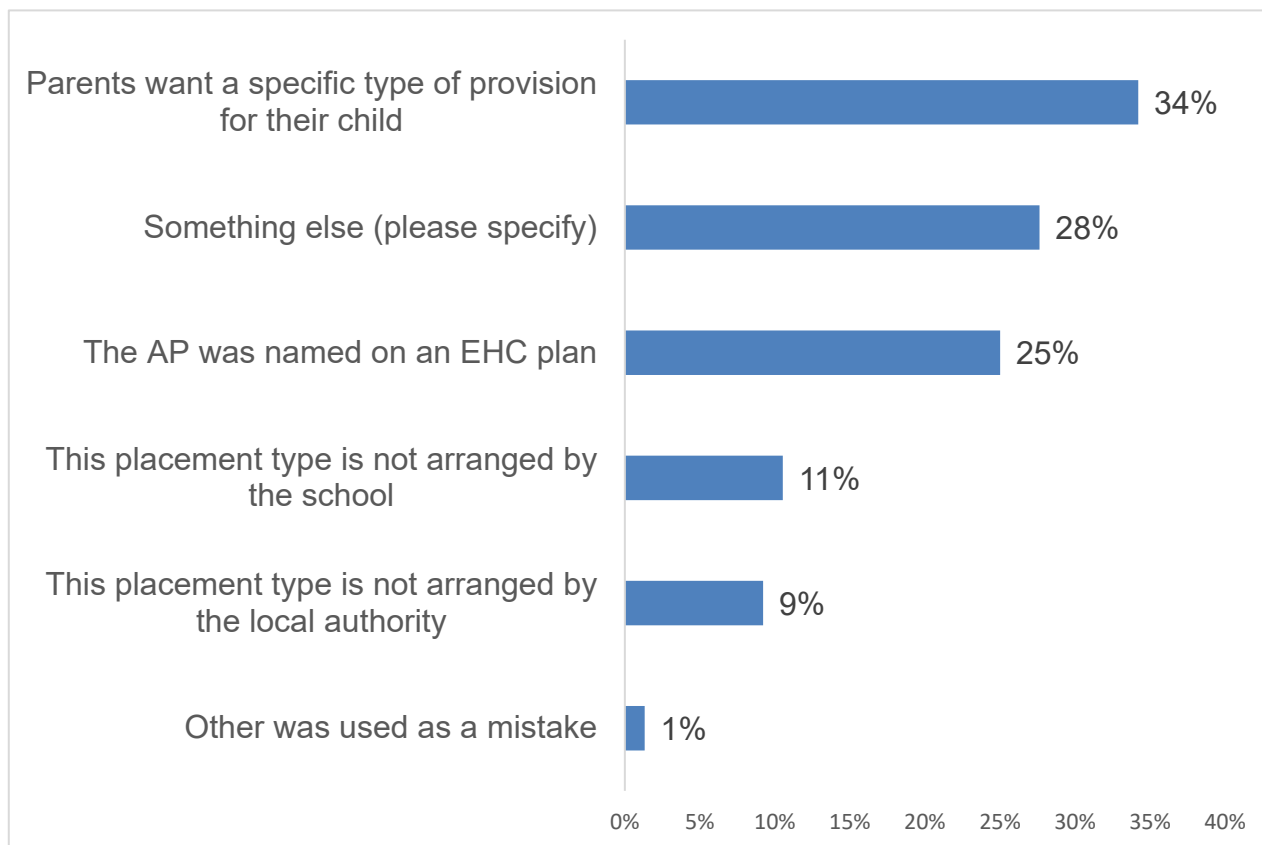
The third most common response overall was 'something else', where open text was given. This qualitative data was analysed, and the most common response stated that the code Other was used for placing non-EHCP pupils in AP when they have been excluded, (5), for a period of support and intervention (4), to prevent exclusion (2), when there was no suitable provision within the LA (2), to carry out assessments (1), when a placement was funded by Social Care (1), when the pupil had medical needs (1), while waiting for a place (1), or for a child missing education (1).

Pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

The same question was asked of all respondents for AP placements using the placement reason code Other where pupils do have an EHCP. The most common reason for using this code was that parents wanted a specific type of provision for their child (34%). This answer code in our survey could be interpreted as parents wanting the AP as their child's education provider, or as parents wanting a different type of education provision and the

AP is used in the interim. Twenty-five per cent of respondents said that the AP was named on an EHCP.

Figure 3. When the code Other is ticked as a reason for placing a pupil in AP who has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), what are the most common reasons for this?



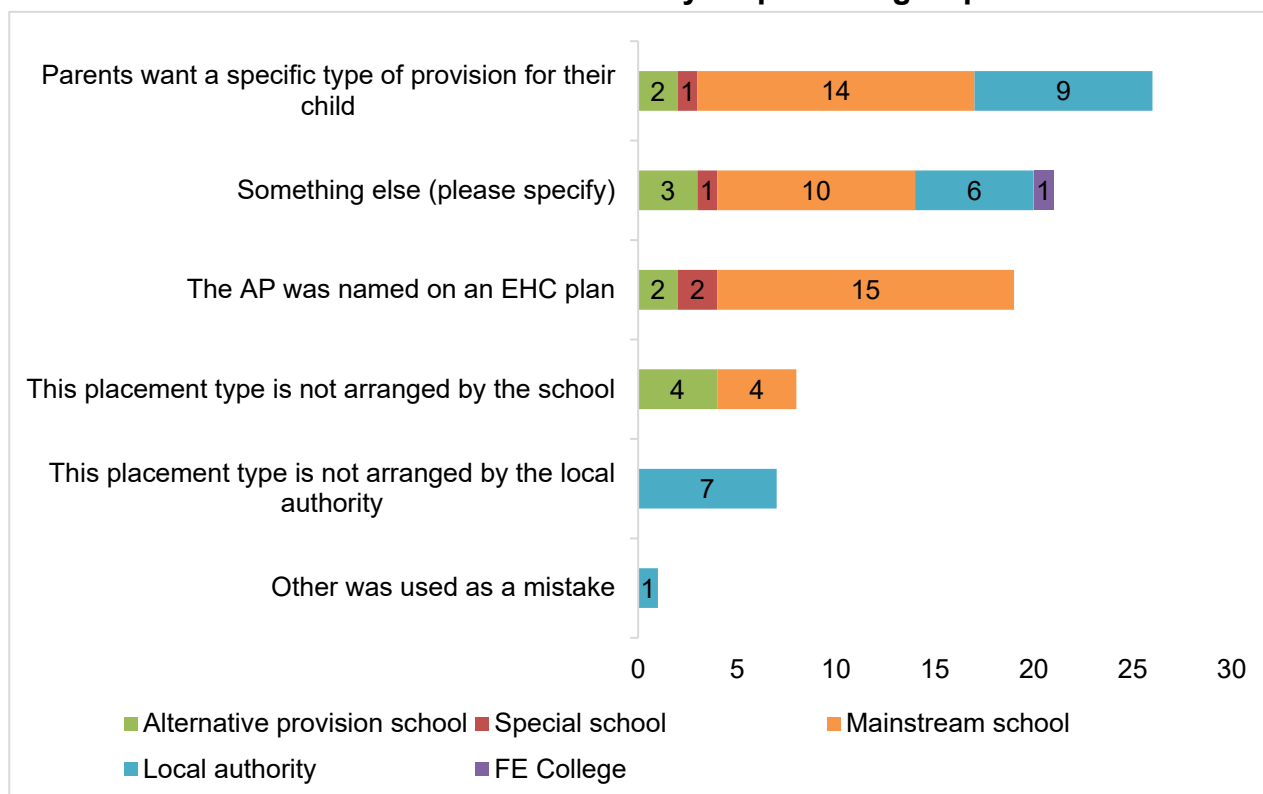
Base = 76. This question allowed multiple answers and will not sum to 100%.

The second most selected response to this question was 'something else', which required open text responses. Respondents who selected this option said they used the code Other when placing EHCP pupils into AP to better suit the pupil's needs (6), because the provision set out in the EHCP could not be fulfilled in the local area (4), because the school couldn't meet the pupil's needs (3), there was parental pressure (2), child missing education (1), Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) provision (1), for reengagement in learning (1), or because of permanent exclusion (1).

The most common response from mainstream schools was that the AP was named on an EHCP. For local authorities, the code other was most frequently used because parents wanted a specific type of provision for their child (Figure 4). Some local authorities and schools stated that they did not arrange this type of placement for pupils with EHCPs.

Local authorities were asked if the setting had been named on a pupil's EHCP in cases where they have an AP placement reason of Other. The majority of LAs said either they didn't know (48%), or no (43%). Only 2 local authorities said yes (10%) and of those, when asked why they didn't code this as 'Setting named on EHCP', they stated that one was awaiting placement and one said it was not clear if the Pupil Referral Unit they planned to place the pupil in was able to be named on an EHCP.

Figure 4. When the code Other is ticked as a reason for placing a pupil in AP who has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), what are the most common reasons for this? Count by respondent group.



Base = 76. Mainstream schools = 40, local authority = 22, alternative provision school = 9, special school = 3, FE college = 2. This question allowed multiple responses.

Placements from alternative provision

Alternative provision schools occasionally fill out referral information for single-registered pupils who are joining their provision. As such, this respondent group was asked why the code Other is used in this circumstance. Of the 11 APs who responded to this question, most (10) said they do not use the code Other, or don't know. The one AP who did, said they used the code Other when a pupil was returning from elective home education, which is an existing code that should be selected (Table 2).

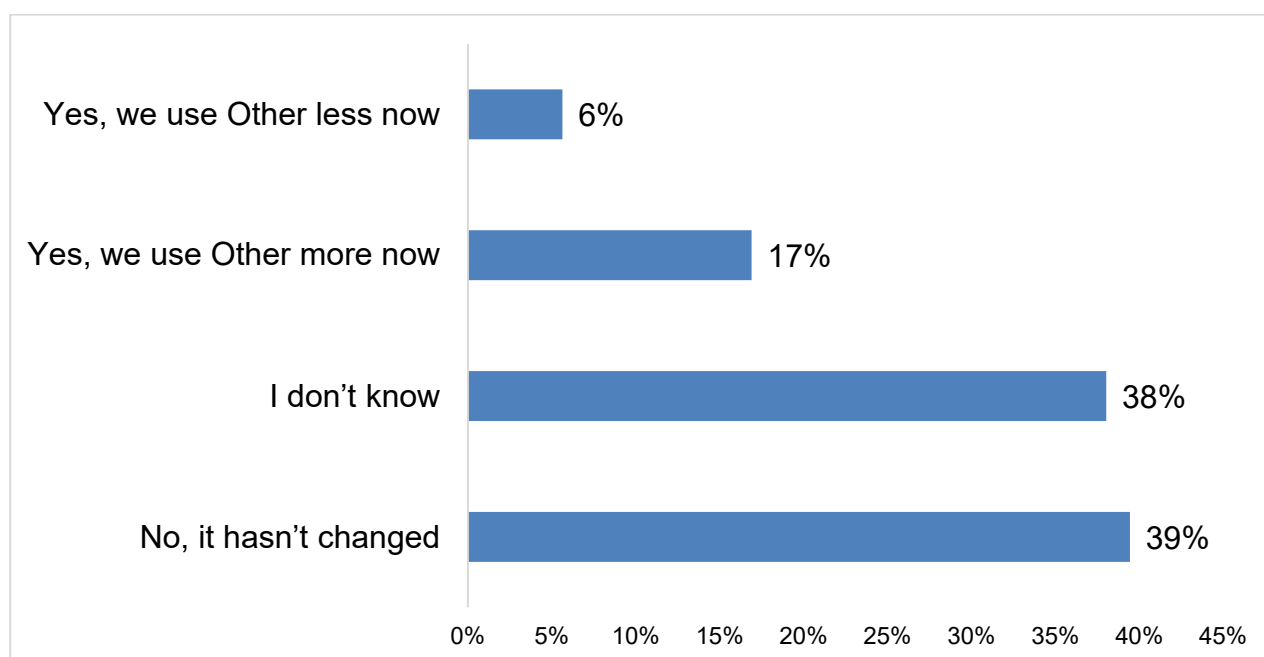
Section 19 duty

Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on Local Authorities (LAs) to make suitable alternative education for children of statutory school age who cannot attend school because of illness, exclusion or any other reason. If a child is permanently excluded, the LA must provide alternative full-time education from day 6 of the exclusion. In this survey, those responding on behalf of a LA were asked in the circumstances that they arrange an AP to fulfil their Section 19 duty, what are the reasons that they would select the code 'Other' as placement reason. Of the 18 LAs who answered this question, 8 stated that they wouldn't use this placement reason. Ten LAs would use the code Other, with 9 using it for pupils awaiting placement and 1 using it where the provision was funded by Social Care.

Change in placement reasons

All respondents were asked if their use of the code Other for AP placement reason had changed over the last five years. Seventeen per cent of respondents said that they were using the placement code more now (Figure 5). When asked why this was, respondents stated that it has increased because the needs of pupils are increasing (5), it's difficult to meet needs appropriately (5), mainstream schools can't meet pupil need (4), AP is being used more now (4), numbers of AP spaces are reducing (2), increase in complexity of placements (2), a lack of special school places (1), directed placements are required (1), unsafe pupil behaviour is increasing (1), pupils are awaiting AP places (1) and that they have moved from naming AP in EHCP to coding the placement reason as Other (1).

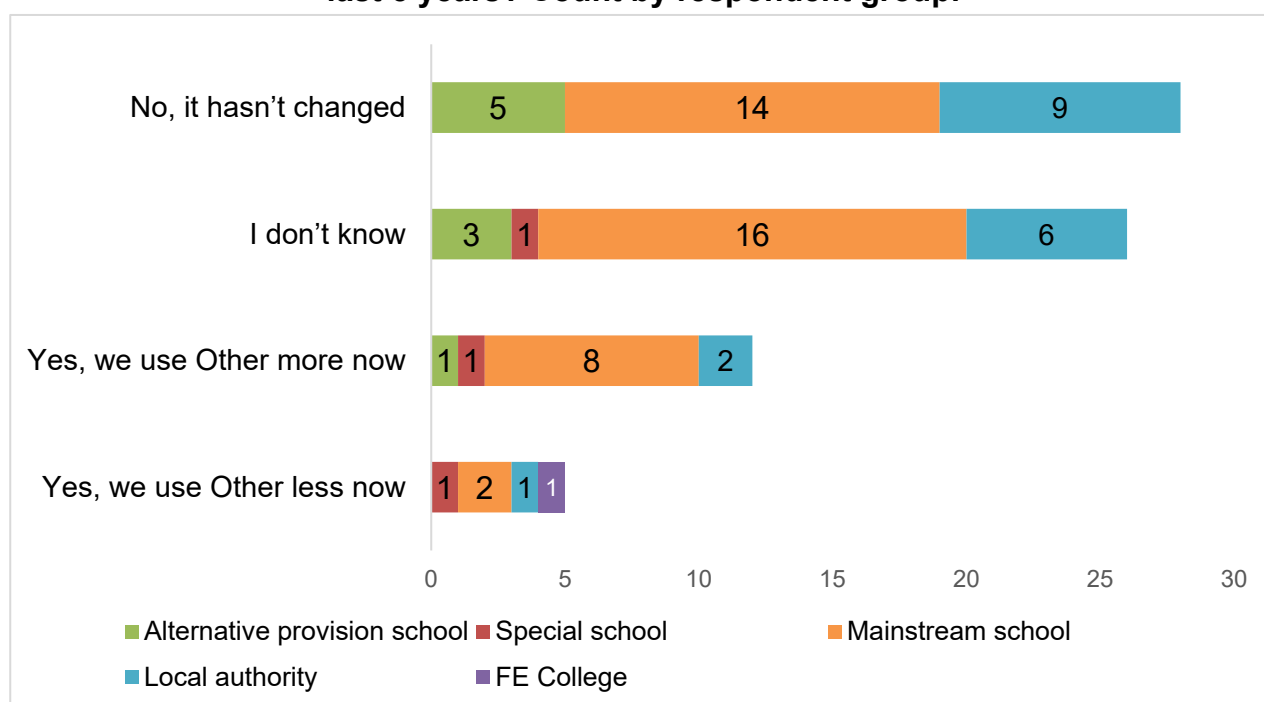
Figure 5. Has your use of the code Other for placement reason changed over the last 5 years?



Base = all respondents, 71.

Mainstream schools were most likely to state that they didn't know if their use of the placement code Other had increased in the last 5 years, with local authorities most commonly stating that their use of Other had not changed (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Has your use of the code Other for placement reason changed over the last 5 years? Count by respondent group.



Base = 71. Mainstream schools = 40, local authority = 18, alternative provision school = 9, special school = 3, FE college = 1.

Summary and recommendations

This research set out to understand why schools and local authorities are using the code Other as a placement reason when placing a pupil in alternative provision. In circumstances where pupils do not have an EHCP, 71% of those who used Other selected this code when AP is used for reengagement in learning, as well as for safeguarding reasons (28%). For instances where pupils are being placed in AP who do have an EHCP, parental preference for this provision was the most commonly stated reason for using the code Other (26%).

Across all questions which gave the opportunity for open text responses, a strong theme emerged that Other is being used as a placement reason when pupil needs cannot be met, whether that is because the mainstream school cannot meet the needs, the needs cannot be met locally, because the provision set out in the EHCP could not be fulfilled in the local area, pupil needs are increasing, or the complexity of placement requirements.

The Department will use the information collected in this survey as part of its regular review cycle for both the School Census and the AP Census. This improved evidence base furthers our understanding of why AP placements are made by schools and LAs and provides insight on how alternative education providers are being used to meet pupil needs.



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