IntegratED

Alternative Provision Quality Toolkit

2022

Foreword

It is estimated that there are at least 32,083 pupils educated across at least 761 alternative provision settings in England[1].

These pupils are amongst those with the highest levels of need and most significant vulnerabilities in the country. 81% of pupils in alternative provision (AP) are on the SEND (special educational needs and disability) register, which is almost six times more than in mainstream schools[2]. Almost half (47%) of pupils in AP are eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared to 13.6% of their mainstream peers[3]. The significant scale and extent of pupils' needs in the AP sector - which has been further compounded by the coronavirus pandemic - means that it is now more important than ever for these pupils to receive a high-quality education which is appropriately calibrated to their needs.

Rather than a cul-de-sac of opportunity and aspiration that some AP pupils face, there should be a continuation of provision that enables pupils to access a range of support and education provision, as required.

In alternative provision settings across the country there is some fantastic work being done. But there are also vast inconsistencies in AP practice and performance and several cold spots, where pupils have a poor-to-zero chance of receiving a quality education. There are also significant data and evidence gaps which impede efforts to truly understand current practice and make meaningful and sustainable system improvement. These need to be addressed.

There are several complex structural factors that impact alternative provision, such as the wide range of pupils' needs, the various lengths of time pupils spend in AP, funding disparities and the impact of practice and capacity within local schools and support services. Therefore, a well-considered, purpose-built and evidence-based approach to AP quality is needed.

The AP Quality Toolkit has been developed through extensive collaboration with AP sector stakeholders and represents the most viable and comprehensive approach ever developed to evaluate and improve AP quality. Through implementation of the AP Quality Toolkit, we can work based on a shared consensus of the characteristics of good quality AP, and policy makers, school leaders and commissioners can develop strategies which lead to genuine and sustainable improvements. This toolkit can facilitate greater collaboration within local education eco-systems - such as between local authorities, AP settings, commissioners and other agencies – which are crucial to ensure that every child receives the education and support they require and deserve.

Alongside our signatures, at the time of publication, the toolkit has received endorsements from over 100 colleagues working in and around the AP sector. Demand for this solution is so strong. The toolkit is already being used and is having a positive impact on professional dialogue and practice in five local authority areas and in AP settings across the country. If policymakers, AP leaders, local authorities and commissioners implement the approach outlined in the toolkit's recommendations, then across the sector we will be able to consistently ensure high-standards and high-support for all pupils.

The toolkit provides a comprehensive framework, shared understanding and common vocabulary for AP quality at national, local and individual levels. We believe that the AP Quality Toolkit has the power to transform the way AP quality is understood, evaluated and improved and should be adopted by all stakeholders.

Mark Vickers MBE
Chief Executive Officer,
Olive Academies

Cath Kitchen OBE
Chair, National Association
for Hospital Education

Robert Gasson
Chief Executive,
Wave Trust

Sarah Johnson
President,
PRUsAP

Tim Morfin
Chief Executive,
Transforming Lives for Good (TLG)

Janice E Cahill OBE
Independent SEMH Education
and Mental Health Consultant/Adviser

About IntegratED

IntegratED is a coalition of partner organisations working to reduce preventable exclusions and improve the quality of education for children excluded from school. We do this through a whole-child development lens.

It is our belief that all young people should leave school with the skills, values, aptitudes and capabilities necessary to realise their full potential and contribute to the common good.

We are working across the education, charity, and policy sectors, training teachers, trialling interventions and conducting research in order to achieve long-term systemic change. Our partners are:

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Acknowledgments

To ensure that our findings were informed by practice and representative of the needs and challenges of the sector we've been engaging with an ever-growing group of stakeholders.

We would like to thank the school leaders, teachers, education professionals, local council staff, researchers, charity leaders and other individuals who have generously contributed to this project - your time, expertise and feedback have been invaluable.

We would also like to recognise those who are already putting our findings and recommendations into practice. Whether through our formal pilots or by using our summary report we are delighted to see that this new approach to AP quality being adopted.

Special thanks to:

Sector support

To date, this project has garnered widespread support from across the sector and the country.

We are running pilots in 5 areas and have had over 100 organisations and individuals endorse this approach to evaluating and improving AP quality.

Blackpool
Local Authority

Sheffield
Local Authority

Tameside
Local Authority

Gloucestershire
Local Authority

Bristol
Local Authority

Plymouth
ACE Schools
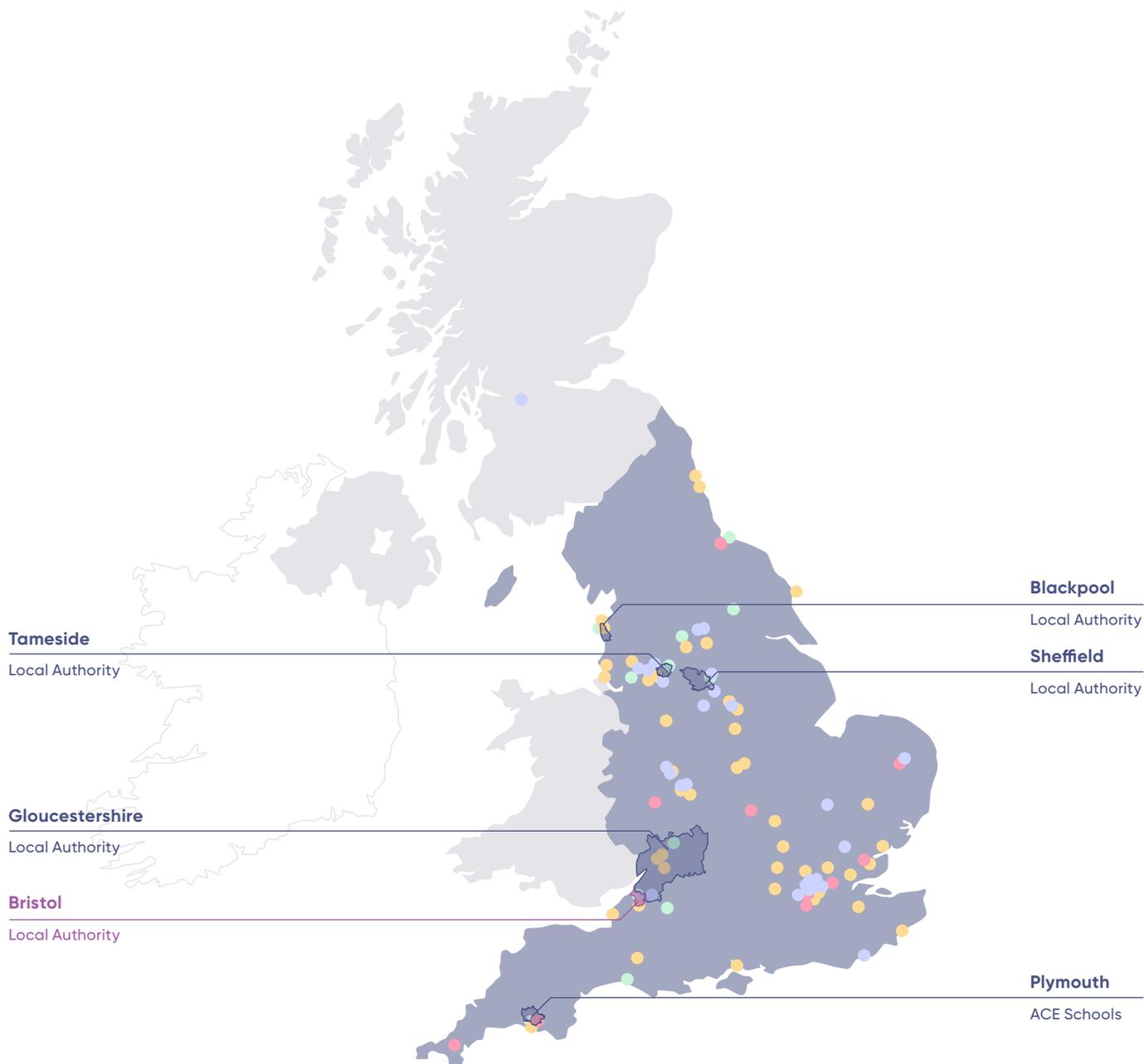
Implementation:

○ Pilot

○ Adopted

Endorsements:

● Council

● Multi-academy Trusts

● Schools and education providers

● Charities, universities, social enterprises, and other organisations

Sector support

These organisations and individuals represent wide spread coverage and support from all regions of England and include endorsements of the toolkit from 11 local authorities, 10 Multi-Academy Trusts, 47 schools and education providers, and 37 other organisations.

Council	Name
Blackpool Council	Paul Turner
Bristol City Council	Chris Davies
Calderdale Council	Parveen Akhtar
City of York Council	Maxine Squire
Dorset Council	Lisa Linscott
Gloucestershire County Council	Philip Haslett
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	Clare Mahoney
Sheffield City Council	Kevin Straughan
Tameside Council	Jane Sowerby
Warrington Borough Council	Simon Lennox
Wiltshire Council	Teresa Mcilroy

Multi-academy Trusts	Name
Alternative Learning Trust	Emma Bradshaw
Keys Co-operative Academy Trust	Philomena Cozens
Oasis Community Learning	John Bradshaw OBE
Olive Academies	Mark Vickers MBE
River Tees Multi-Academy Trust	Christina Jones
Severn Academies Education Trust	Adrian McLean
The Inspiration Trust	Claire Heald and Iain Mackintosh
The Skylark Partnership Trust	Cath Kitchen OBE
Transforming Futures Trust	Gavin Gracie
Wave Trust	Robert Gasson

Sector support

Schools and education providers	Name
ACE Schools	Matthew Bindon
Aspire AP	Debra Rutley
Birchwood Pupil Referral Unit	Jane Waters
Bridgelea Primary School	Helen Shaw
Circles Alternative Education Ltd	Alex Stone
City of Liverpool College	Julie Brennan
CP Riverside School	Mark Eyre
Educational Diversity	Victoria O'Farrell and Karen Lewis
ENGAGE	Ian Barr
Evolve Academy	Nigel Hall
First Class Tailored Solutions Ltd	Beverley Kirk
Gloucester and Forest Alternative Provision School	Philippa Dancey
Gloucester Youth Project	Carl Ives
Haybrook College	Jamie Rockman
Headlands School	Sarah Bone
Heybridge Co-operative Academy	Phil Davis
Leicester City Primary PRU	Nicola Anderson
Leicester Partnership School [aka Secondary PRU]	Shaun Whittingham
London East Alternative Provision (LEAP)	Astrid Schon
LPW School	Dan Carter
McKee College and Chadwick High	Andrew Murray
Merit PRU	Sarah Whiteley
Moor End Academy	James Wilson
Moorbridge PRU	Karen Croskery
New Leaf Centre	Stu Evans
Open Box Education Centre	Alison Dolan
Phoenix Place	Sophie Nelson
Potters Bar Clinic School (CAMHS)	Tara Stowe

Sector support

Progress Schools Limited	James Madine
R.E.A.L. Education & R.E.A.L. Independent Schools	Kay Carter
REACH School	Nicola Redhead
Rocksteady Training	Peter J Townsend
Solihull Alternative Provision Academy	Stephen Steinhaus
South Somerset Partnership School	Jo Simons
St Aubyn Centre Therapeutic Education Department	Steph Yates
Stroud and Cotswold Alternative Provision School	Nick Stanton
The Academy of Central Bedfordshire	Jeremy Dodd
The Albany (AP)	Jane Reason
The Boxing Academy	Anna Cain
The Key Education Centre	Leanne Forde-Nassey
The Rowans AP Academy	Fiona May
The Seeds of Change	Rachael Frossell
Three Towers AP Academy	Anne Isherwood
Transforming Lives for Good (TLG)	Tim Morfin
Trafford Alternative Education Provision	Lynda Thompson
Voyage Learning Campus	Emma Gundry
Westside School	Patricia Hanley

Charities, universities, social enterprises and other organisations	Name
Achieving for Children	Sheldon Snashall
Ambition Institute	Abigail Williams
Anna Freud Centre	Adelaide O'Mahony
CAPE Mentors	Hussein Hussein
Commando Joe's	Mike Hamilton OBE
Education Futures Trust	Carole Dixon
Fair Education Alliance	Gina Cicerone and Samantha Butters
FFT Education Data Lab	Dave Thomson

Sector support

Impetus	Ben Gadsby
Independent education and mental health consultant	Janice Cahill OBE
IntoUniversity	Rosie Williams
Jearni Sciences CIC and WILD Learning Ltd	Professor Ruth Crick
Just for Kids Law	Natalie Williams
Learn Sheffield	Sai Patel
Leeds Alternative Provision Association (LAPA)	Lee Garner
MAP Charity	Charlie Stobbart
MCR Pathways	Iain MacRitchie
National Association of Virtual School Heads	Jancis Andrew
National Literacy Trust	Kyle Turakhia
PRUsAP	Sarah Johnson
Race on The Agenda (ROTA)	Eleanor Stokes
Rainbow Rural Centre	Carol Monk
Relationships Foundation	John Ashcroft
Right to Succeed	Catherine Murray
Saint Edmunds Society (St Eds)	Lorraine Bliss MBE
Social Finance	Sara Parsonage
Switch Midlands CIC	Tim Wakefield
Teach First	Nic Harrison
The Difference	Will Moss
The Education Policy Institute	Jo Hutchinson
The Tutor Trust	Joanne Meredith
The RSA	Toby Murray
TLC: Talk, Listen, Change	Michelle Hill
Whole Education	Douglas Archibald
Youth Hostel Association	Anita Kerwin-Nye
University of Birmingham, Educational Leadership Academy	Professor Colin Diamond
University of Wolverhampton, Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing	Professor Damien Page

1. Integrated, 2021. Annual Report 2021.

2. Centre for Social Justice, 2020. Warming the cold spots of alternative provision: A manifesto for system improvement. P9

3. Department for Education, 2018. Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2018

Contents

Executive summary

In May 2020, as part of the IntegratED project, the Centre for Social Justice published **'Warming the Cold Spots of Alternative Provision: A manifesto for system improvement'.**

This report explored the quality of educational outcomes for pupils in alternative provision (AP). The report found a paucity of government data by which to meaningfully and effectively judge success in AP, and an absence of standardised measures in AP to effectively evidence academic attainment and 'progress in social and emotional aspects of child development'[1]. The report recommended the development of a more comprehensive framework for the evaluation of quality in AP. In response to this recommendation, this project was created.

The purpose of this project was to answer the question of: 'What are the characteristics of good quality alternative provision?' and to develop an approach to improving AP quality that:

- Identifies and facilitates the sharing of good practice.

- Integrates with and adds to existing DfE guidance and the current Ofsted inspection framework.

- Takes into consideration the varied purposes of different AP settings[2].

- Supports improvements in practice which are in the best interest of their pupils.

The report recommended

the development of a more comprehensive framework for the evaluation of quality in AP

"

The steps taken were as follows:

- Primary research with AP stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of AP quality.

- Review of existing research on AP, AP quality and adjacent topic areas.

- Examination of current DfE and Ofsted guidance and local authority practice.

- Conceptualisation of different approaches to evaluating and improving AP quality.

- Extensive consultation with AP sector stakeholders to test concepts and gain feedback.

- Refinement of the AP quality toolkit concept, in collaboration with the AP sector.

- Piloting programmes with local authorities and AP schools and providers[3].

Executive summary

Currently, there are a range of sources of information that can be used to attempt to identify, evaluate and monitor AP practice and performance, such as Ofsted inspections, local authority quality assurance, reviews by commissioners[4], self-evaluation and limited local and national performance data. These various activities and sources of information combine to form an incomplete, insufficient, inefficient and inconsistent view and understanding of AP quality. This does not provide a strong basis from which to improve understanding and drive the change and improvement required within the AP sector. Equally, traditional frameworks and barometers such as those used to evaluate quality and measure success in mainstream education are insufficient in this context.

In 2021, Pupil Referral Units were the most common AP destination for pupils (7,665 pupils)[5]. However, since records began in 2018, the most common type of AP commissioned by local authorities has been unregistered. Available data shows that the unregistered AP market has grown considerably over recent years[6] and in 2021 the number of pupils known to be in unregistered provision increased by 17% (3,128 pupils).[7]

The government does not keep records on the total number of unregistered providers or the number of pupils within them. Unregistered provision settings are not subject to Ofsted oversight and inspection and the quality assurance and regulation of these types of settings is variable across different local authorities.[8]

The composition of the AP ecosystem varies greatly from one local authority to the next. IntegratED research has found that some areas are partly or wholly reliant on unregistered provision. For example, in January 2021, ten areas relied heavily on unregistered alternative provision, commissioning anywhere between 51% and 95% of their identifiable AP places from unregistered provision[9]. Some great practice exists within unregistered settings, however, nationally, there is a considerable lack of consistent scrutiny and quality assurance. This paper does not address the issue of registration or address questions around the role of Ofsted and other quality assurance bodies, but we recognise that these are foundational issues that will need to be addressed. The Centre for Social Justice and the APPG on School Exclusions and Alternative Provision will be looking at these broader questions in the coming months and providing recommendations on reforms that will improve AP quality and quality assurance.

During the initial phases of this project, we explored four different potential approaches to evaluating and improving AP. These were performance measures, league tables, comparative clusters and a bespoke data tool. Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive analysis of these different approaches. Through scrutiny and analysis, we identified significant flaws and found that, in all likelihood, each of them would fail to catalyse meaningful improvement in AP. In addition, some stakeholders shared concerns that approaches such as performance measures and league tables would not only fail to deliver the desired improvement but could in fact be detrimental to the sector and its pupils.

The AP Quality Toolkit offers a robust methodology for evaluation and improvement planning and has been designed to work in all contexts and across all types of settings. Below is a non-exhaustive list of how the toolkit can be used to:

1. Enable AP leaders to carry out robust self-evaluation and improvement planning.

2. Quality assure and improve AP schools and providers.

3. Ensure quality and suitability during commissioning.

4. Examine practice across a locality or group of AP schools and providers.

5. Assess the preparedness of prospective AP schools and providers prior to opening.

6. Support peer review between AP leaders.

7. Evaluate and improve mainstream schools' in-school AP.

In May 2021, we published a summary of our research into the characteristics of good quality AP.

This toolkit has been formulated following extensive research carried out over two years. We engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders to identify the key challenges associated with understanding AP quality and to develop a solution. Primary research data has been collected through meetings, consultation and feedback sessions with stakeholders from across the AP sector and education more widely. This toolkit is also underpinned by secondary research gathered during a literature review of existing alternative provision research.

Executive summary

This toolkit takes an in-depth look at the AP Quality Toolkit approach and includes our research findings, examples of practice and evaluative questions. It also outlines the ways the toolkit can be used, as proven through our school and local authority pilot programmes. We also make recommendations for how the AP Quality Toolkit can be implemented by The Department for Education, Ofsted, Local Authorities, AP schools and providers, commissioners and mainstream schools.

The AP Quality Toolkit takes a broad and balanced approach to evaluating effectiveness in AP and can be used and applied in all contexts. However, settings' effectiveness in each quality area will be impacted by their available resources.

Having each aspect of AP practice and performance individually defined enables robust examination of the work that is being done as well its impact. Each of the 13 quality areas also interconnect and intersect with one another. To avoid ineffective implementation, a single quality area should not be over-emphasised or seen as an indicator of quality in isolation.

1. Centre for Social Justice, 2020. Warming the cold spots of alternative provision: A manifesto for system improvement. P70

2. AP settings include AP schools, academies, Pupil Referral Units (PRU's) Further Education colleges, registered and independent providers. For ease of reading, in this report, they will be referred to as AP schools and providers.

3. The term AP provider will be used to reference to organisations that provide education but are not classified as schools.

4. Department for Education, 2018. Investigative research into alternative provision. IFF Research Ltd P40

5. Integrated, 2021. IntegratED Annual Report 2021. P16

6. Integrated, 2020. IntegratED Annual Report 2020.

7. Integrated, 2021. IntegratED Annual Report 2021. P49

8. Integrated, 2021. IntegratED Annual Report 2021. P46

9. Integrated, 2021. IntegratED Annual Report 2021. P50

Recommendations

Implement the Alternative Provision Quality Toolkit.

The below table outlines how this recommendation can
be adopted by each stakeholder group.

The Department for Education

1. Promote and share the AP Quality Toolkit to all AP schools and providers.

2. Promote and share the toolkit to all commissioners of AP.

3. Promote and share the toolkit to all local authorities.

4. Launch an online evaluation tool (similar to the compass tool, for Gatsby Good Careers) to systematise and support use of the toolkit by AP leaders and Local Authorities.

5. Improve the quality of data so that practice and performance can be understood and evaluated more accurately. Including the tracking of transitions, attainment, attendance and unsuccessful placements.

6. Incorporate the 13 quality areas into DfE guidance.

7. Develop additional resources and guidance for each of the quality areas.

Ofsted

8. Ensure that mandatory alternative provision training for inspectors is aligned with the AP Quality Toolkit.

9. Ensure that future changes to the Ofsted inspection framework that will impact AP education and commissioning reflect the AP Quality Toolkit.

Local Authorities

10. To use the Alternative Provision Quality Toolkit to underpin all AP related activities, including to:

   • Enable AP leaders to carry out robust self-evaluation and improvement planning.

   • Quality assure and improve AP schools and providers.

   • Ensure quality and suitability during commissioning.

   • Examine practice in your locality.

   • Assess the preparedness of prospective AP schools and providers prior to opening.

   • Support peer review between AP leaders.

AP Schools and providers

11. Use the Alternative Provision Quality Toolkit to underpin self-evaluation, school improvement planning and peer review.

All commissioners of AP (Local Authorities, mainstream schools, AP schools and providers)

12. Use the Alternative Provision Quality Toolkit to underpin quality assurance of AP commissioning.

Mainstream schools

13. Use the Alternative Provision Quality Toolkit to evaluate and improve any in-school AP.

Rationale for change

There have been calls from many quarters over the years for a consistently used, universally applicable, comprehensive and systematic approach to evaluating and improving AP quality, including:

Charlie Taylor, Government Behaviour Advisor, 2012.

Recommended 'That information is shared between schools and providers and that locally this leads to clear and realistic plans with baselines against which to measure progress (including towards reintegration into mainstream schooling, further education, or employment)'.[1]

Thomson and Pennacchia commissioned by the Prince's Trust, 2014.

'The quality question is now more pressing than ever, as the trend for schools and local authorities to commission alternative education provision gathers momentum... there needs to be more and better information about quality in alternative education'.[2]

DfE, Alternative provision: effective practice and post-16 transition, 2017.

'More work is needed to examine the effectiveness and reliability of tools to measure the outcomes of AP... 'there is no consensus on what the constituent parts of an appropriate alternative curriculum should be'.[3]

House of Commons Education Committee, 2018.

'Fundamentally, outcomes for children in AP are not good enough and their successes and achievements often go unrecognised. Their outcomes are currently judged against mainstream performance measures and do not take into consideration the circumstances that have led pupils to be educated in alternative provision'.[4]

Government response to the Education Select Committee, 2018.

'We recognise that, beyond Ofsted judgements, there is no systematic way of identifying and celebrating effective practice in AP... we intend to develop a bespoke performance framework for the AP sector... The development of the performance framework will consider a number of metrics such as improved attendance, destinations and educational outcomes. We are committed to developing a range of options for how this framework could be used in practice, and we will test these across the education sector before considering how to introduce them nationally'.[5]

ISOS partnership report, 2018.

'As AP leaders pointed out to us, one of the challenges for their sector relates to how their performance and impact are measured'.[6]

DfE, Investigative research into alternative provision, IFF Research Ltd, 2018.

"Assessing quality can be difficult, as there are different opinions about what counts as good quality alternative provision".[7]

Centre for Social Justice, Warming the Cold Spots of Alternative Provision, 2020.

'We recommend the development of a set of national benchmarks tailored to AP schools that take into account their specific context and challenges... They must be designed with the purpose of enabling AP schools to improve, raise standards, and learn from one another, but must under no circumstances create a high-stakes accountability system for AP'.[8]

Rationale for change

Our research found a common desire amongst education leaders and other stakeholders for improvements to the way AP quality is evaluated and understood. For example:

- AP commissioners such as mainstream headteachers shared their desire for knowledge and certainty that local AP settings are high quality.

- Despite the wide variety of provisions and contexts they operate within, AP leaders shared a desire for a robust way in which to evaluate their current practice and performance and identify areas for further improvement.

- Local authorities have been keen to adopt a robust research-led approach for evaluating the quality of existing and prospective AP settings and to strategically support local sector improvement.

The AP Quality Toolkit provides a comprehensive, evidence-based and universally applicable approach to evaluating and improving AP quality.

How to use the AP Quality Toolkit

Our pilot programme and ongoing collaboration with the sector are demonstrating the value, relevance and utility of the toolkit in all contexts.

Below are 7 ways in which the toolkit can be used with examples from our pilot programmes.

Use	Implementation example	Comments
1. Enable AP leaders to carry out robust self-evaluation and improvement planning	In Plymouth, ACE Schools, which are part of the Transforming Futures Multi-Academy Trust, have been using the toolkit to structure their self-evaluation framework (SEF) and their school development plan (SDP). Middle leaders are now leading improvement projects based on the areas of development identified. Similarly, in Blackpool, Educational Diversity has used the toolkit to self-evaluate their practice and have added resources, templates and links to each of the 13 quality areas to create a one-stop shop for colleagues to be able to access key information.	"We are excited to be part of national, cutting-edge research and as a school using the toolkit has been invaluable in helping us to add real structure and focus to our school development planning" **Matthew Bindon, Headteacher, ACE Schools** "A really useful toolkit that has given us step changes in approach and development. These are already showing the early signs of significant pupil enhancements. The toolkit is also enabling a different conversation with the local ecosystem of education, regulators and peers." **Gavin Gracie, CEO, Transforming Futures Multi-Academy Trust** "I am really excited about the toolkit, it's so helpful for headteachers like me. It certainly helps to focus our strategic plan for improvements and partnering with other leaders as part of the evaluative process will really benefit us." **Victoria O'Farrell, Headteacher, Educational Diversity**

Rationale for change

Use	Implementation example	Comments
2. Quality assure and improve AP schools and providers	Tameside is piloting the toolkit as a means of strengthening quality assurance practices across its area. It is enabling them to develop a plan to identify the quality of existing provision with certainty and precision.	"This is an excellent and useful tool that has saved us a lot of time as we do not have to re-invent the wheel. We are having important conversations about AP quality in Tameside and are piloting the toolkit as a means of facilitating robust quality assurance of alternative provision in our area". **Jane Sowerby, Head of Education Improvement and Partnerships, Tameside Metropolitan Borough**
3. Ensure quality and suitability during commissioning	Bristol local authority have revised their AP commissioning strategy. Alongside a new robust safeguarding assessment for providers, based on Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, Bristol have built their quality assurance processes on the AP Quality Toolkit's 13 quality areas.	"High-quality AP should be understanding of young people's needs and supportive of their aspirations, as well as understanding its role within the wider educational ecosystem. The toolkit sets this out in a way that is clear for providers. It also provides Bristol council with a clear framework for monitoring AP, and complements and supports our strategic vision of belonging for young people throughout the education system." **Alex Bate, Children's Commissioning Team, Bristol City Council**
4. Examine practice across a locality or group of AP schools and providers	Sheffield local authority via Learn Sheffield is exploring the toolkit's application with unregistered settings. They are undertaking an initial evaluative process with AP leaders and then progressing on to work collaboratively with them to develop strategic improvement plans.	"We are using the AP Quality Toolkit with a selection of providers, including an unregistered provision, to explore how the AP Quality Toolkit can initiate changes and improvements in practice. We have found that AP leaders love it and that it works flexibly in different contexts." **Sai Patel, Improvement Partner, Learn Sheffield**
5. Assess the preparedness of prospective AP schools and providers prior to opening	Blackpool were the first local authority to pilot the AP Quality Toolkit. Initially, they used it to develop a more robust mechanism by which to assess and support applicants who want to set up new AP education provisions in the town. They are now planning further rollout that will enable them to map the collective strengths and areas for improvement of AP across Blackpool.	"This toolkit has enabled us to demonstrate to prospective AP providers that we understand AP quality and have high standards – which we expect them to meet. The 13 quality areas have been particularly valuable in enabling us to provide rigorous and constructive feedback on areas for development to both successful and unsuccessful applicants." **Paul Turner, Assistant Director, Blackpool Council**

Rationale for change

Use	Implementation example	Comments
6. Support peer review between AP leaders	Blackpool and Gloucestershire local authorities are exploring peer review opportunities across their regions. Their focus will be on peer reviewing AP leaders' self-evaluations.	"We are trialling ways in which the AP Quality Toolkit can be used to support AP settings in Gloucestershire. As we move forward this will primarily relate to how it may be used as a self-assessment tool by school leaders, including through peer review." **Teresa Cross, Education Lead, Education Outcomes and Intervention, Gloucestershire County Council**
7. Evaluate and improve mainstream schools' in-school AP	Sheffield local authority via Learn Sheffield have completed the toolkit evaluation process with an in-school AP and have then progressed to work collaboratively to make strategic improvement plans.	"We are using the AP Quality Toolkit with a school that has an on-site AP. We have found that school leaders love it and it can be applied flexibly to suit in-school AP contexts." **Sai Patel, Improvement Partner, Learn Sheffield**

1. Department for Education, 2012. Improving Alternative Provision. Charlie Taylor. P7

2. Thomson, P, and Pennacchia, J. 2015. What's the alternative? Effective support for young people disengaging from mainstream education. The Prince's Trust. P6 and P11

3. Department for Education, 2017. Alternative Provision: Effective Practice and Post 16 Transition. Sue Tate Consulting Ltd. P5-7

4. House of Commons Education Committee, 2018. Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions. P37

5. DfE, 2018. Government response to the Education Select Committee's fifth report of Session 2017-19 on alternative provision.

6. Department for Education, 2018. Alternative provision market analysis. ISOS Partnership. P104

7. Department for Education, 2018. Investigative research into alternative provision. IFF Research Ltd. P40

8. Centre for Social Justice, 2020. Warming the cold spots of alternative provision: A manifesto for system improvement. P71

Features and benefits

Improvement-oriented:

This toolkit can support leaders' pursuit of excellence as it promotes the sharing of effective practice and encourages continuous improvement. It facilitates a thorough evaluation of AP quality and is not a means by which to compare often uncomparable AP settings. Our research found that differences in purpose and function, the availability of resources, pupils' needs and placement lengths, as well as the respective operational scales of AP settings, mean that comparisons and the achievement of predetermined targets are inherently unreliable indicators of quality.

Sector-led:

The toolkit has been developed through extensive consultation and collaboration with a broad range of AP leaders, local council education teams and other sector stakeholders from across the country.

Evaluative:

This toolkit has been designed with the purpose of improving the quality of AP. It enables stakeholders such as AP school and provider leaders and local authority teams to robustly evaluate effectiveness, determine their priorities and plan subsequent improvement activities.

Compatible:

It provides amplification to the key points made in Ofsted's school inspection handbook regarding the way in which the Education Inspection Framework applies in PRUs as well as in AP free schools and academies.

Concrete:

This toolkit provides a methodology to evaluate AP quality on national, local and individual levels. It provides a common language and vocabulary for conversations about AP quality.

Comprehensive:

This toolkit provides a comprehensive overview of the core components of AP quality. This approach avoids placing disproportionate emphasis on any single aspect of AP practice or performance and has been developed with the knowledge that some aspects of AP education are not easily quantifiable with statistics. It includes aspects of AP quality and leadership that are sometimes overlooked, such as 'workforce development and wellbeing' as well as 'home and family engagement'.

Robust:

The quality areas are also underpinned by a robust secondary research evidence base.

Universal:

It recognises the nuances and intricacies within the AP sector and is suitable in all AP contexts. It is accommodating of the diverse functions and purposes of different AP settings. For example, it does not simply measure individual student-level outputs, which may be irrelevant in some contexts, such as post-16 destination figures. Instead, it includes such metrics as part of a thorough evaluation of the underlying substance and quality of education in AP.

Flexible:

This toolkit approach offers more flexibility than comparative evaluative measures as it has the potential to stimulate robust evaluation whilst recognising the differences between AP settings. It can be used in a wide variety of scenarios – to evaluate a single AP, a group of providers or schools across a Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust, or to quality assure and support the development of new AP.

The categories

The AP Quality Toolkit includes 13 quality areas across three categories: Community, Curriculum and Currency.
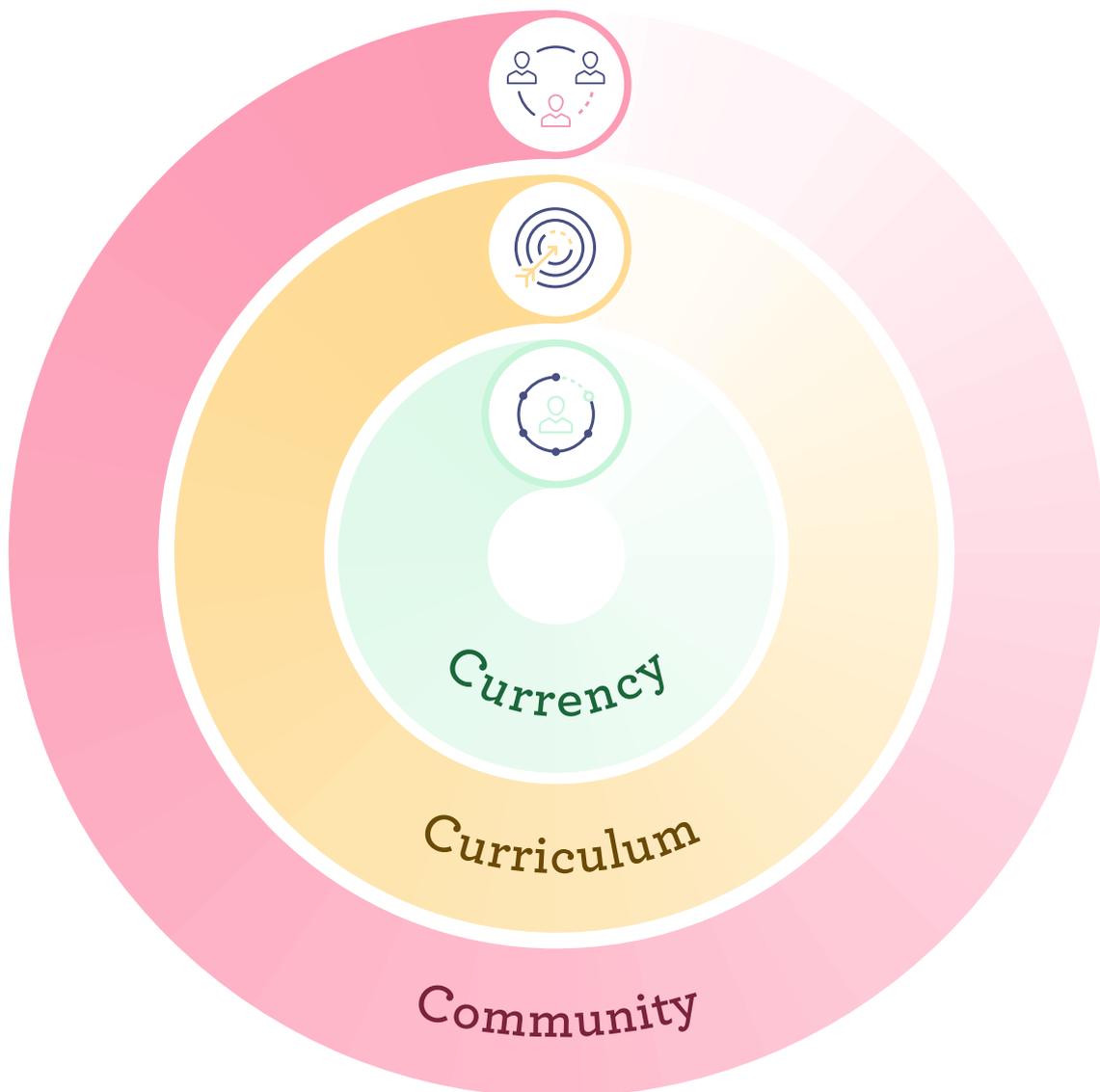
Currency

Curriculum

Community

Community recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

Curriculum accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Currency focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

The 13 quality areas

Community

1. Workforce development and wellbeing
2. Home and family engagement
3. Partnership working:
    a) Local authority
    b) Mainstream schools
    c) External alternative providers
    d) Other agencies
4. Research and innovation

Curriculum

5. Pupil induction
6. Attendance and engagement
7. Supporting pupils' needs:
    a) Literacy
    b) Special educational needs and disability (SEND)
    c) Health and wellbeing
8. Quality of education

Currency

9. Personal development
10. Qualifications
11. Assessment of need
12. Appropriate transition:
    a) Mainstream school
    b) Other Alternative Provision
    c) Specialist provision
13. Post-16 destinations

The 13 quality areas

Community

Recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

1. **Workforce development and wellbeing.** Recruiting, retaining and developing high quality staff within a supportive school culture.

2. **Home and family engagement.** Establishing strong relationships with parents and carers that support them and lead to improvements in pupil attendance and engagement, behaviour, learning and attainment.

3. **Partnership working.** Safeguarding and meeting pupil needs through strategic partnership working with local authorities, mainstream schools, external AP providers and other agencies.

4. **Research and innovation.** A commitment to continual development, innovation and the application of evidence-based practice, such as trauma-informed approaches for pupils who have Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Curriculum

Accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, the quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5. **Pupil induction.** A robust induction process that increases understanding of pupils' backgrounds and needs, supports decision-making and facilitates the development of positive relationships.

6. **Attendance and engagement.** The culture and systems of attendance and engagement that ensure high aspirations for pupils, timely interventions and sustained improvement over time.

7. **Supporting pupils' needs.** Building relationships and understanding and adeptly supporting pupil needs including their literacy, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, physical and mental health and wellbeing.

8. **Quality of education.** A well-planned, broad, ambitious and tailored curriculum that enables pupils to learn, progress and develop in preparation for their next stage of education, employment or training.

Currency

Focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

9. **Personal development.** The provision of opportunities and support to develop the behaviours, skills and character necessary for pupils' current and future success, including resilience, confidence, self-management and teamwork.

10. **Qualifications.** Enabling all pupils to attain a broad, ambitious and valuable portfolio of qualifications.

11. **Assessment of need.** Equipping pupils, parents/carers and future education professionals with the knowledge and understanding necessary to address pupils' needs at home and in future learning environments.

12. **Appropriate transition.** Robust planning, communication and support that facilitates successful transitions to mainstream, other AP or specialist provision, when appropriate.

13. **Post-16 destinations.** The preparation of pupils for their next steps after year 11 including Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIAG), employability skills and transition support.

Understanding the AP Quality Toolkit

The 13 quality areas, which are separated into the three categories – community, curriculum and currency are important aspects of AP that impact upon pupils' experience, education and outcomes.

Having each aspect of AP practice and performance individually defined enables robust examination of the work that is being done as well as the impact of it. Yet, each of the 13 quality areas also interconnect and intersect with one another. For example, the effectiveness of home and family engagement (2) will influence: partnership working (3); attendance and engagement (6) and; appropriate transition (12). Similarly, pupils' securing and succeeding in their post-16 destinations (13) will be underpinned by their literacy (7a), personal development (9), qualifications (10) and assessment of need (11).

> **The AP Quality Toolkit takes a broad and balanced approach to evaluating effectiveness in AP.** "

Having each aspect of AP practice and performance individually defined enables robust examination of the work that is being done as well as the impact of it. To avoid ineffective implementation, a single quality area should not be over-emphasised or seen as an indicator of quality in isolation. Similarly, having emerged through in-depth research and extensive sector consultation all 13 quality areas are to be regarded as important and necessary aspects of AP quality. For example, looking only at aspects of currency would miss the very essence of the toolkit which is intended to facilitate comprehensive evaluations of both practice and performance.

Rather than merely changing how AP outcomes are measured, the approach we are advocating for focuses on evaluating and improving the aspects of AP practice and performance which have the most significant impact on pupils' experiences and education.

The following sections of this toolkit include the 13 quality areas, the findings of our research, what AP leaders told us, and examples of practice from AP settings. The examples of practice are not intended to be used as blueprints or seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach this project has taken with the AP sector.

Each quality area concludes with a set of evaluative questions. These questions have been developed and refined through our school and local council pilot programmes and are to be used to structure reflections and conversations about AP quality. The appendices include the evaluative questions, along with an evaluative template, both of which can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Community

Community recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

1. Workforce development and wellbeing
2. Home and family engagement
3. Partnership working
4. Research and innovation

1. Workforce development and staff wellbeing

Recruiting, retaining and developing high quality staff within a supportive school culture.

1.1. Having quality staff is foundational

This quality area is foundational as it has a direct impact on all other areas. For example, the extent to which AP staff are trained, equipped and supported will underpin the way in which they are able to build positive and lasting relationships with parents and carers, pupils, colleagues from other organisations and each other. All quality areas within the 'community', 'curriculum' and 'currency' categories, are closely linked to this quality area.

1.2. Systemic sector challenges

Effective AP staff are well trained, caring and knowledgeable[1] and are required to demonstrate high levels of resilience, patience and openness to different approaches.[2] However, when seeking to recruit and retain high calibre staff AP leaders face several challenges:

- Volatility in funding, based on changes to funding formulas as well as annual fluctuations in pupil numbers, often makes long-term workforce planning and investment difficult.

- There is minimal movement of staff between mainstream and AP[3].

- Teachers are required to possess a specific blend of attributes, as high-quality subject specialists able to build strong and trusting relationships with vulnerable pupils[4].

- Alternative provision settings can be demanding environments to work in.

1.3. Recruitment, training and development

Given the challenges AP leaders face in recruiting staff it is crucial that staff are given opportunities to train and develop throughout the course of their careers. AP schools and providers with high quality practice in this area demonstrate a strong commitment to their staff and provide comprehensive and tailored continual professional development (CPD)[5] that helps them to prepare for and meet the demands of their roles.

High-quality AP schools and providers plan for staff development and allocate the necessary time and resources to ensure that it can be done to a high standard. For example, some leaders provide a weekly or fortnightly programme of CPD activities, regular updates and summaries of latest policy guidance and research to staff[6], and pay for staff to undertake additional external training[7]. Each of these things help to address contextual training

needs and enable staff to tailor their teaching and support to the needs of their students.[8] Some schools ensure maximum value is gained from any external training by asking staff to synthesise and share the key learnings with colleagues.

Thomson and Pennacchia's research found that 'the alternative education sector is characterised by staff and organisations with strong commitments to making a difference for young people who might otherwise miss out on the education to which they are entitled'[9]. In addition to commitment, new and existing staff require training to differentiate their support and manage difficult and sensitive situations[10]. This should include trauma informed practice, traditional safeguarding

and contextual safeguarding. Additional developmental training opportunities also enable staff to adjust to evolving school and pupil needs. High quality training and development opportunities can enable staff to maximise their effectiveness, move into different roles and contribute to their retention.

AP leaders told us...

That many within the sector have adopted a 'growing our own' approach, which enables staff in various roles to undertake training and work towards qualifications that will enable them to progress into new roles within the organisation and therefore, be retained.

One example included a catering assistant who with support transitioned to become a teaching assistant. This move led to her finding greater enjoyment in her work and pupils were able to build upon the existing relationships they had with her rather than being required to get to know a new member of staff.

1.4. Understanding pupils' needs

AP staff work closely with pupils who have complex needs[11], safeguarding risks and difficult personal circumstances. This can include pupils who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)[12], criminal justice involvement and those with mental health needs. 64% of pupils in AP have SEMH as their primary SEND need, 1 in 3 pupils has social worker involvement at the point of exclusion and children in gangs are 6 times more as likely to have been in alternative provision.

AP settings are usually smaller and often less hierarchical than mainstream schools, allowing for positive relationships to be formed between pupils and staff based on a wide range of factors. AP schools and providers with quality practice in this area draw on the strengths of their entire workforce, including teachers, teaching assistants, mentors and support staff to provide high quality support and education to their pupils.[13]

AP leaders told us...

That all their staff, not just their teachers, need to have an understanding of pupils' needs and how to interact with them, this includes caterers, caretakers, receptionists and staff in administrative roles.

In one school, all staff and students were assigned to a 'house', which forged a collective sense of belonging. It provided opportunities for pupils to interact with staff who they wouldn't otherwise meet and also helped those staff to gain a greater sense of connection with the school's mission and purpose.

Another example included a looked after child (LAC) pupil who often struggled to manage her emotions and maintain relationships with her peers. When she was having a difficult time, she would ask to sit quietly in reception. This was a space she felt safe in and, when she was able, the receptionist would engage the pupil in conversation to help her to regulate her emotions, reflect and decide on an appropriate way to move forward.

1.5. Staff wellbeing

In addition to ensuring that staff are trained and supported to do their jobs effectively, staff wellbeing can also be supported by considering environmental factors, aspects of organisational culture and other demands that may impact staff. Anna Freud, National Centre for Children and Families published the 'Ten steps towards school staff wellbeing'[14]. They are applicable to an AP context and are available **here**.

The combination and compounding effect of complex needs, and challenging circumstances often translates into emotionally taxing work for AP staff. AP staff can suffer vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue[15], which is a condition characterised by emotional and physical exhaustion which leads to a diminished capacity to empathise with and support others. This is a natural, predictable, counteractable consequence of working with people who have or are experiencing trauma[16]. As a result, it is essential that effective systems of support and reflective practices are put in place 'such as coaching and supervision, where practitioners reflect on cases with the support of an independent specialist'[17].

1.6. The impact of development and wellbeing

Positive relationships[18] and staffing consistency[19] are essential ingredients when working with vulnerable pupils and a lack of staffing continuity can be a setback to this work. If high-quality staff are not supported, developed, and retained the AP workforce's capacity to facilitate school improvement and support young people will be diminished. Conversely, by growing and developing staff, building upon their strengths, and relying upon their intrinsic motivation to become excellent in their profession[20] they will be supported to become the leaders of the future the sector will need.

Here is the first 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: Aspire AP

Aspire AP offers a rich Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme, strong staff networks, extensive training and development opportunities and a robust induction course.

The trust has a staff wellbeing charter, and they ensure that employee wellbeing support is engrained into the working day. The teaching staff debrief with each other, at the end of the day, in recorded meetings, to better facilitate professional development. A staff wellbeing survey is conducted twice a year. Debra Rutley, Aspire AP's CEO, also offers staff off-site, one-to-one wellbeing meetings, with the same frequency. The trust also holds events for its employees such as 'Maintaining perspective, managing stress and prioritising self-care' workshops.

The staff sit with the pupils, during breaktimes where games are played, and conversations made. This develops the staff-pupil relationships, whilst supporting staff wellbeing – the trust finds that its staff's collective welfare is improved by nurturing these relationships, as pupils' classroom behaviour improves.

The trust also seeks to promote from within and up-skill its staff, based on their individual needs and skills gaps; this improves morale and strengthens pre-existing networks. For example, a qualified English teacher, who had a background in hospitality, has been able to transfer from the former to teach Catering GCSE and 'Cooking 4 Pleasure'. Another, with a mathematical background, has led the Mechanics courses offered. Teachers' passions and hobbies are intertwined with the extra-curricular programme, to maximise job satisfaction. A staff member with a fascination for Japanese culture recently led a correspondingly themed school festival.

A bespoke CPD programme via 'Astra Teacher Training' has been developed by Aspire AP and has been completed by Aspire AP staff and teachers from 250 schools. This well-attended course harnesses the insight of external speakers and Aspire AP's own educators. New starters are also inducted with a leadership course centred on a mind management model. They are guided by the trust's 'Leading with Love' handbook; it sets out uncompromising standards for what teachers should be achieving, based on the notion that pupils can learn any skill. A capacity to be empathetic, is an essential requirement when recruiting. When selecting teachers, the trust seeks to appoint subject specialists, with secondary school experience who are adept at building relationships with disadvantaged pupils.

Aspire AP is rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. Their inspection report stated that staff members receive personal coaching, work in supportive networks and continuously seek self-improvement and the multi-faceted CPD programme produces 'high quality teaching'.

Community – 1. Workforce development and staff wellbeing

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this quality area. They have been developed and refined through our pilots and can be used by leaders and any other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- Are staff suitably qualified and skilled to perform their roles?

- Is there a well-planned CPD programme that meets the differentiated needs of staff?

- How do CPD activities enable staff to be more effective in the contexts in which they work?

- What evidence is there that staff are well supported and cared for?

- Is feedback on staff wellbeing gathered and are the results reviewed and acted upon by leaders and governors/trustees?

Community recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

1. Workforce development and wellbeing
2. **Home and family engagement**
3. Partnership working
4. Research and innovation

2. Home and family engagement

Establishing strong relationships with parents and carers that support them and lead to improvements in pupil attendance and engagement, behaviour, learning and attainment.

2.1. Systemic sector challenges

AP schools and providers often take the initiative to service needs as they arise and are adept at finding creative ways to develop relationships with parents and carers.

However, the extent and depth of engagement strategies implemented is heavily determined by their organisational size and the staffing resources they have available[21].

2.2. The importance of relationships

Building trusting relationships between home and school is fundamental to a pupil's progress and success at school. Parents and carers have a key role to play in their children's learning and wellbeing. When parents and carers are positively involved children are more likely to have improved self-confidence, are more likely to see the importance of school, be healthy and gain higher grades[22]. Effective home and family engagement provides opportunities that enable parents and carers to be involved at all stages of their child's education and journey in AP.[23]

The necessity for strong relationships between school and home is intensified by the prevalence, extent and complexity of needs faced by AP pupils and their families. Pupils with SEN support are 5.0 times more likely, and pupils with an EHCP 2.4 times more likely to be permanently excluded than pupils not on the SEND register[24]. AP pupils are also nearly 3.5 times more likely to be eligible for FSM and are 13 times more likely to have social worker involvement[25].

AP leaders told us…

That the pandemic exposed and intensified the supportive role they provide for families. AP leaders shared various examples of undertaking work which is beyond the traditional and statutory remit of a school or provider of education. Examples included providing food, clothing and basic toiletries as well as offering parenting support sessions and attending appointments in lieu of parents.

2.3. Collaboration between school and home

'Schools and parents or carers are the two main educators that children have in their lives. Both have crucial roles to play in a child's engagement and achievement in school, and the impact is greater when they work in partnership'.[26] Unfortunately, there is also a strong association between lower levels of parental support for learning and pupils who attend alternative provisions.[27] AP schools and providers who have demonstrated longevity in effective and consistent school-home engagement, have a whole school strategy, a positive approach to family liaison and provide staff with the training and time required to do this important work.

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families advocate that 'adopting a whole-school approach towards engaging with parents and carers can be effective, and part of that means making the mental health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and parents and carers 'everybody's business'. It involves all parts of the school working together and being committed. It requires partnership working between governors, senior leaders, and all school staff as well as parents, carers and the wider community'.[28]

There is an association between exclusion and familial adversity as well as a strong correlation between areas of high deprivation and areas where a high proportion of the school population is educated full-time in AP.[29] School-home links can help to meet specific familial needs that may not otherwise be addressed and help staff to learn about pupils' histories, home environments, behaviour outside of school and parental relationships which can be used to inform practice within school.[30]

2.4. Initial parent/carer interactions

In mainstream schools, home and family engagement begins during open events and transition days, however, in AP home and family engagement can commence either at the point of permanent exclusion or referral. These initial stages are the most important time to engage parents with their child's education. Young people and their families can often feel angry, resentful, alienated and powerless because of their experience during the exclusion, referral and transfer process[31]. Many parents and pupils also share feelings of anxiety and stigma prior to starting in AP[32] which can intensify and compound existing issues and barriers these families may be experiencing. AP leaders have found that engagement with parents during this initial stage is pivotal to the future success of engagement during a child's placement[33]. The first meeting is often key to establishing a new climate, a new relationship, and to begin to build trust[34]. When parents and carers are treated as partners with valued expertise, they are more likely to support a school's efforts and decisions. Taking a welcoming, respectful and professional approach to initial interactions, and providing opportunities such as taster visits, often leads to parents and carers expectations being exceeded.[35]

AP leaders told us…

That it is crucially important to 'get under the skin' of a pupils' education journey. They described that best way to do this is through conversations with parents.

Pupil induction (5) will cover how AP schools and providers can partner with parents to help pupils get settled into school. After the initial stages, continuing to involve parents and carers in a positive way can help to combat any reticence to engage and counter negative perceptions of alternative provision[36]. Also, it can increase the consistency of expectations, values and aspirations between home and school which leads to improved outcomes. Home and family engagement is more likely to be effective when it is strategic, continual and relational, rather than haphazard and transactional.

2.5. Six domains of home and family engagement

Professor Damien Page's research in AP and family engagement found that 'Working within the most complex educational context with families within the most complex environments, APs operate within the gaps left by other agencies for the good of the children within their care. Yet while the needs of children remained their ultimate priority, the needs of family often proved to be the major barrier to educational success'. Settings had developed a sophisticated assemblage of engagement and support that was simultaneously highly structured and planned on one hand and improvised and spontaneous micro-work on the other'.[37]

This research also identified that home and family engagement in AP is enacted through six domains, as summarised below:

1. **Behavioural:** this involved modelling behaviour management techniques but also managing the behaviours of families by challenging inappropriate interaction and setting boundaries for communication.

2. **Emotional:** initially this focused on the child including their mood and wellbeing but also considered the emotions of families. They comfort and coach, they provide a listening ear, and they empathise, developing an extensive understanding of the affective context of the parents.

3. **Safeguarding:** in AP safeguarding is an essential practice, a blend of proactive and detective work that spots signs and patterns of behaviour that would give rise to concern and intervenes as appropriate. In the most serious of cases, referrals were made to other agencies such as the police or social services.

4. **Functional:** here was the micro-work, the pragmatic actions that addressed the immediate practical needs of families in terms of practical, financial, medical, hygiene and wellbeing.

5. **Pedagogic:** while primarily – but not exclusively – delivered by teaching staff, teaching activities and lesson topics were shared, learning successes and challenges communicated so that learning could be extended into the home.

6. **Capacity building:** here practitioners assisted families in understanding the complexities of the education system, particularly the legality of school exclusions, but also how to navigate the complexities of the wider social services assemblage, with an emphasis on how to work effectively with multiple agencies.[38]

2.6. Intentional communication

Regular and constructive dialogue should be maintained to provide parents and carers with pupil progress updates, share successes and deal with any arising issues such as poor behaviour or non-attendance.[39] However, it is important that communication is carried out in a systematic and co-ordinated manner. Otherwise, parents may receive multiple possibly conflicting messages or be contacted too frequently repeatedly with negative feedback about their child.[40] Such communication issues can create and exacerbate relational issues between parents and schools.[41]

In addition to communication via phone calls, texts, email messages. AP schools and providers usually employ a range of more time intensive strategies including home visits, in-school parent meetings, family learning sessions and training programmes. The EEF recommends home visits particularly for parents that struggle to attend meetings in-school and structured, parental and carer programmes to develop positive behaviour and consistency where needs are greater.[42] AP schools and providers also adopt informal tactics for building relationships including social events such as tasting a new lunch menu, Christmas events and family breakfasts, which can provide a more relaxed environment for engagement.[43]

2.7. A worthwhile priority

Home and family engagement can support the entire breadth of school activities and goals[44], from improving attendance and engagement (6), encouraging personal development (9) through participation in sports and the arts or preparing pupils for appropriate transitions (12).

Schools and providers who ensure their staff have the skills and time to communicate and collaborate with parents and carers are more likely to build positive relationships and garner support at home for what they are doing.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: The Pears Family School

The Pears Family School is an alternative provision school which delivers an integrated child and family mental health and learning programme.

Parents and adult family members are invited to attend and participate in lessons with their child and are encouraged to learn and implement key techniques used by teachers and teaching assistants. All school staff have a basic understanding and awareness of mental health, and some teachers are trained to offer therapeutic interventions alongside their everyday teaching.

In addition to attending lessons, parents and carers are provided with a weekly Parent Learning Programme. This psychoeducational curriculum is underpinned by evidence-based practice and mental health research and includes topics such as mentalization, executive functioning and working memory. This provides parents and carers with helpful knowledge that can be used to support their children's mental health as well as their own.

The integration of family, mentalization and group-based elements into the everyday teaching environment promotes significant and sustained change for children initially presenting with complex and challenging difficulties. It also helps families to overcome the social isolation associated with school exclusion.

Pears also undertake outreach work to mainstream schools, where they provide training on home and family engagement strategies, approaches and evaluation.

Effectiveness of their home and family engagement is evaluated via the school's 'Parent and Carer Engagement Scale' which ask parents and carers 36 multiple choice questions. This is completed on arrival at the school and then at regular intervals to assess progress. The results are analysed to identify strengths and areas for further improvement.

They have found that their focus on home and family engagement positively impacts their pupils, their average attendance is 92%, and 76% of students return to mainstream settings.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. They have been developed and refined through our school and local authority pilot programmes. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How are pupils and their families supported to embed what is learned at school within the home environment?

- Is there a co-ordinated approach to communication and engagement with parents and carers? Does this consider frequency of contact, sharing positives and issues and other key information in a timely manner?

- Are parents and carers invited to provide feedback on the way in which they are engaged with and supported? What do the findings indicate?

Community recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

1. Workforce development and wellbeing
2. Home and family engagement
3. **Partnership working**
4. Research and innovation

3. Partnership working

Safeguarding and meeting pupil needs through strategic partnership working with local authorities, mainstream schools, external AP providers and other agencies.

3.1. Collaboration is essential

There are multiple stakeholders to the education and wellbeing of young people. The 2019 Timpson Review found that 'it cannot be the job of schools alone to understand and address the complex underlying needs that children may have'.[45] The meeting of pupils' needs, and safeguarding practices can be substantially enhanced through partnerships with local authorities, mainstream schools, local employers, external AP providers and other agencies.

In April 2021, Mark Vickers MBE commented at the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for school exclusions and alternative provision 'good alternative provision understands that it has to work in partnership with others. It can't work in isolation'.[46] AP schools and providers have a key role to play and must not be treated as institutional islands. Similarly, AP leaders are vitally needed professionals who are well positioned to help to facilitate and co-ordinate multi-agency working for the benefit of their pupils.

Pupils in AP are likely to require additional support and interventions from a variety of sources to ensure they are educated, engaged, inspired and safeguarded. The AP cohort have significant social, emotional, mental health and behavioural needs as well as an increased vulnerability to safeguarding risks such as serious youth violence, criminal and sexual exploitation, substance misuse and online grooming.[47] To tackle these challenges multi-disciplinary collaborative professional communities are needed to safeguard and educate young people[48].

3.2. Collective responsibility

Numerous research reports including government commission research into exclusions and AP have consistently found that effective local systems require collaboration that brings together professionals from a wide range of organisations, including, mainstream, special and AP schools and providers, FE and sixth-form colleges, local authority, SEND specialists, early help and social care, the police, youth offending teams and local health services.[49] In some areas AP settings and AP leaders are overlooked and therefore, are unable to engage meaningfully in local collaborative partnerships.

Effective partnership working of this kind requires systematic collaboration and well-planned communication[50]. Developing a strong sense of collective responsibility for pupils placed in AP between local authorities, mainstream schools and AP schools and providers is crucially important for collaborative working.[51] Conversely, variable or ineffective communication between different agencies can have a negative impact upon the quality of support for pupils.[52]

That in different areas, surrounding services have varying levels of capacity, proactivity and capability which impacts upon their ability to develop and maintain effective partnerships. Despite this many are playing a crucial role in building relationships and facilitating or contributing to strategic partnerships in their localities.

In different areas, surrounding services have varying levels of capacity, proactivity and capability which impacts upon AP schools and providers' ability to develop and maintain effective partnerships[53]. Despite this many APs are playing a crucial role in building relationships and facilitating or contributing to strategic partnerships in their localities.

a) Local Authority

Effective partnership working with local authorities can help to ensure that pupils are appropriately placed, based on their needs and information sharing can help to identify concerns and reduce safeguarding risks. When issues arise, strong links can ensure that interventions, additional resources and support can be allocated swiftly to pupils and their families.

3.3. Local relationships

Our research found that, AP leaders' views of the referral and transition process is to a large extent dependent on their relationship with local schools and even more importantly their local authority. In some cases, close working relationships and information sharing with local authorities can enhance pupils' prospects of transitioning back into mainstream schooling, if appropriate. Partnership working also offers the most sustainable approach for schools and local authorities to make the best use of their resources[54]. Local authorities (LAs) can play a crucial role in brokering partnerships across areas and facilitating collaborative initiatives between schools.

AP leaders told us…

That when they operate across and hold relationships with multiple local authorities there is often the additional challenge of navigating differences in policies and approaches, service-level agreements, levels of capacity and expertise, funding and expectations.

Similarly, others shared that they could have anywhere between 5 and 20 commissioning schools from the surrounding area, often a lack of joined up thinking means that each of these schools can have their own quality assurance processes, which combine to create a huge train on senior leadership time.

They shared that these issues create duplication of tasks, disparities in additional support available to pupils and inefficiencies in their ways of working.

b) Mainstream schools

3.4. Support for mainstream schools

Where local education systems are effectively working collaboratively it is evident that mainstream schools and AP schools and providers are ideal partners. They both have the ambition to support and educate pupils and have varying levels of resource and types of expertise to contribute. This presents an ideal opportunity for two types of schools to learn from each other[55].

Great AP offers expert advice and intervention that both improves schools' own knowledge and skills, and helps pupils stay in mainstream where it is in their best interests to do so. This relies on the availability of effective AP in the local area, but also on the practice of schools valuing and using AP well.[56]

AP schools and providers should not be seen as the end of the line for pupils, but as necessary and important players within the educational ecosystem. Some mainstream schools are successfully developing this narrative[57] by using AP as the first resort rather than the last resort. This involves utilising the expertise of AP staff to work with children with challenging behaviour and additional needs either through offering advice, outreach work or short-term placements, that help children get back on track and help divert them from the pathway to exclusion.[58] AP schools and providers can also provide specialist 'upstream' support with behaviour management and pastoral care, thereby reducing the likelihood of exclusions due to persistent behavioural disruptions.[59] Appropriate transition (12) will cover how partnership working with mainstream schools can aid pupil movement back into mainstream schools when appropriate for pupils.

3.5. Support from mainstream schools

Mainstream schools can offer significant value for AP schools and providers. For example, by enabling staff and pupils to access learning resources such as specialist science equipment, sports facilities and online learning platforms. In 2018, The House of Commons Education Select Committee identified challenges for AP schools and providers in providing subject knowledge development for teachers, this issue is more acute for smaller settings with fewer teachers and for those with staff teaching outside of their specialism[60].

AP leaders told us...

That some AP schools overcome this by partnering with mainstream schools to enable their staff to access a wider pool of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, including subject knowledge development, teacher training and short-term secondments.

Partnership working can also significantly benefit pupils. Some pupils, often those who are dual rolled in mainstream and AP, can benefit from partnership working that allows them to study some subjects at the mainstream school. By co-ordinating the scheduling of timetables, pupils can continue with some of their current courses or gain access to a broader curriculum that meets their specific needs. Many AP leaders believe that pupils are more likely to achieve positive outcomes if their mainstream school remains involved and invested in their progress[61], this is particularly the case when pupils have positive relationships with mainstream staff or desire to return to their former school. The extent to which this is happening is unknown and varies depending on the approach taken by the schools concerned.

3.6. Pupils' transition prospects

Our research found that partnership working with mainstream schools can improve pupils' transition prospects, for example:

1. AP schools and providers can seek to align their exam boards and curriculum sequencing with local schools, for common subjects such as English and maths. This means that pupils can have a smoother continuation of learning when they transition from AP to mainstream.

2. AP schools and providers who have positive relationships with mainstream schools may experience smoother transitions and are likely to encounter fewer challenges.

'Dual registration means that the pupil attends the second school – either part-time or full-time – to receive education that is complementary to the education they receive at their main school.'[62] Effective partnership working enables relationships between mainstream school staff and their pupils to be maintained and enables staff to stay informed of pupils' progress which can create opportunities for trial periods, well-planned phased returns and access to ongoing AP support.

c) External alternative providers

3.7. AP settings as commissioners

In some instances, AP schools and providers will commission places at other AP settings. The use of external alternative providers to provide a suitable curriculum offer for pupils or target meet specific goals such as confidence development, technical skill acquisition or crime avoidance is commonplace in some contexts.[63] Before and while pupils are placed with alternative providers it is crucial to ensure that satisfactory safeguarding measures are in place, the curriculum is appropriate, staff are well trained, and that the partnership is well managed by the AP school.

Unfortunately, some students attend alternative provision at different providers without a clear or consistently applied mechanism for mapping the curriculum they receive in different settings. This means the curriculum they receive sometimes lacks coherence and that the content covered by one provider does not always complement another.[64] In some cases, Ofsted inspectors have found that some students are placed with external providers not due to the quality or suitability of courses but because of capacity issues at the centres. Which often leads to a lack of engagement from pupils and placements not being sustained.[65]

d) Other agencies

3.8. Safeguarding in partnership

As previously discussed, young people in AP face a multiplicity of vulnerabilities.[66] AP schools and providers can play a pivotal role in creating opportunities for pupils to access support services such as; careers advice, the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), health services, crime prevention, drug cessation and counselling support.[67] Integrated student services, also called wraparound services, aim to remove barriers to school success by connecting students and families to charities and service providers in the community or by bringing those services into the school.[68]

Partnership working is particularly important when seeking to safeguard pupils against criminal behaviours and exploitation. 'The earlier children are identified, the greater the potential for working with them to ensure they go on to

lead healthy, safe, law-abiding lives.'[69] Ofsted recommends a multi-agency approach that enables information-sharing and coordinated efforts between schools, colleges, and PRUs, health and social care partners, the police and the local authority, to safeguard pupils from risks of harm such as knife crime.[70]

'Each act of collaboration forces us to see the world anew, rethink our traditional roles, and create new relationships that can help us work differently together on behalf of children and families'.[71] A joined-up approach that includes early identification, information sharing, support for pupils and where necessary their families, is particularly important with regards to safeguarding, mental health and reducing gang involvement, youth violence and criminal exploitation.[72]

Example of practice: Chessbrook Education Support Centre

The Centre has developed a wide network of external providers. Through stringent quality assurance (QA) protocols and support they ensure that these organisations are offering an education that would be deemed 'Outstanding' by Ofsted – the body's 2014 report commented on the meticulousness of this practice.

They ensure that each provider signs a Service Level Agreement (SLA). This SLA underlines the educator's accountability to deliver an outstanding quality of education and their safeguarding responsibilities. Full background and DBS checks are also conducted. The Centre delivers compulsory CPD for the providers during the academic year. This training covers safeguarding, behaviour management and curriculum delivery and the providers are also able to attend the weekly staff CPD sessions at Chessbrook. The Centre visits every external provider daily to carry out robust QA checks. These checks help support the providers and gather information on staff and pupil wellbeing, quality of education, attendance and pupil progress, which is then passed onto the referring schools daily.

The training offered by Chessbrook and the QA procedures ensure that high standards are always maintained. External providers understand the importance of timely and intentional communication between themselves and Chessbrook, so that information can be passed onto parents/carers and the referring schools. Since starting this training, the effectiveness of communication from providers has increased, engagement has increased and pupils' ability to self-regulate their behaviour has improved. All external providers are required to complete half-termly progress trackers that record pupil attendance, engagement, behaviour and progress towards the qualification. These are then passed onto the referring schools.

Chessbrook has built up excellent relationships with the local mainstream schools they support, and offer a four-tiered upstreaming approach. At Tier One, pupils receive outreach support and attend weekly meetings over a two month period. Tier Two provides pupils and parents/carers with more intensive therapeutic programmes. At Tier Three Chessbrook's network of providers are available for schools to commission places for their pupils. Tier Three also includes shared programmes which involve varying ratios of time spent at Chessbrook and the mainstream school. With this focus and commitment to upstream support, only at Tier Four do pupils receive all their education at Chessbrook.

The Centre has also developed a 'Rapid Response' approach; its staff can be called out to assist partner schools with serious incidents. This provides mainstream schools with an on-demand, flexible and specialist support service.

The Centre works closely with Hertfordshire Constabulary. In January 2019, it pioneered the placement of two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) within the school itself, enabling officers to build relationships with Chessbrook's pupils and lead individual and group sessions on knife crime and anti-social behaviour. Notably, one 13 year old pupil, at risk of permanent exclusion, began to consistently attend school after an Officer arranged for her to attend a 'Lives Not Knives' seminar and has sustained this since.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How do relationships with local authorities, agencies, charities and other organisations enhance the effectiveness of support for pupils?

- Are strong relationships being built and maintained with local schools to support pupils, enrich the curriculum and/or develop staff?

- If external education or training providers are used, how are they managed to ensure safety, quality, and value for money?

Community recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

1. Workforce development and wellbeing
2. Home and family engagement
3. Partnership working
4. **Research and innovation**

4. Research and innovation

A commitment to continual development, innovation and the application of evidence-based practice, such as trauma-informed approaches for pupils who have Adverse Childhood Experiences.

The AP sector, like any healthy field, needs an investment in research and development 'to move beyond the best of what we know and practice now', to create the 'better best practices of tomorrow'[73]. The dynamic needs of pupils with multiple overlapping vulnerabilities necessitates that AP professionals learn, discover, and adapt. Good practice, including the example of practice included in this toolkit are often developed through action research or practice-based innovation.

In 2018, there was government funding for research and innovation in AP. The 9 AP innovation fund awardees have delivered a range of projects to 'help children back into school', 'help young people into further education or employment' and 'support parents and carers to be more involved in their child's education'.[74] Another example, of funded innovation and development was the DfE's 2020 and 2021 AP transition fund[75], more information is included about that in post-16 destinations (13).

By implementing evidenced-based practices, teachers and leaders can maximise their impact. Organisations such as ISOS Partnership, AP Research Network and Royal Society of Arts along with IntegratED partners including FFT Education Datalab, The Relationships Foundation, Social Finance and The Difference are all contributing to the sector becoming richer with research. To support this, an online exclusions and AP knowledge hub has been curated.

We firmly believe more, and better use of evidence is crucial in securing greater reliability in our education system, so that children and young people receive the best possible teaching, no matter where they live and no matter what their background.[76]

AP leaders told us…

That they are continually reflecting, evaluating and trying to improve what they do and increasing numbers of staff are participating in networks of AP practitioners.

Many leaders have built in regular feedback and reflection sessions with staff in order to gain an accurate and current understanding of what's happening 'on the ground'. These take place in addition to the more formalised periodic critical evaluation and planning cycles undertaken by senior leadership teams and governors/trustees.

Within the sector, there is a strong appetite to improve and innovate. AP schools and providers with high quality practice in this area are on a journey of continuous development and are always seeking to further improve their support and outcomes for pupils. This toolkit is designed to support evaluation and strengthen the way improvements are planned and delivered.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: The Pendlebury Centre Pupil Referral Unit

The Pendlebury Centre PRU has innovated and undertaken research to ensure that the mental health needs of its pupils are identified and addressed as early as possible.

The Pendlebury Centre was early to chart this territory, in 2004, using monies obtained from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), to set up a multi-agency team known as 'Secondary Jigsaw'. The team comprises mental health practitioners, family workers and teachers. The Secondary Jigsaw team works in mainstream schools providing incremental interventions to pupils. This initiative improved the screening of pupils' emotional and mental health needs, ensuring that interventions were more effectively targeted. Secondary Jigsaw was the first team of this kind, in the United Kingdom.

The centre has researched and developed its own training courses – the four-day 'Developing Skills in identifying and responding to Mental Health Problems in Young people aged 11-16 years' – as well as a mindfulness programme. They have provided opportunities for its staff to attend the Mental Health Training programme and it has also been utilised by other AP schools and providers.

In conjunction with Stockport Council and the local healthcare services they have supported the development of an emotional wellbeing strategy.

They have adopted it at Pendlebury and are helping other schools to do the same. They have assisted schools in their appointment of an 'emotional wellbeing lead' – a unique individual responsible for mental health in the schools, who provides a link to available expertise, discusses concerns about individual pupils and provides staff with half-termly 'Checkpoint' meetings. These schools also have access to a CAMHS 'school link practitioner'.

The Pendlebury Centre PRU's work in this area was recognised, in the 2017 Green Paper, 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' and by Sir Andrew Carter, in 2015, when he inserted a mental health module, into the national ITT framework. The Centre was rated 'Outstanding', by Ofsted, in 2017. This work continues to be a strength and area of focus for The Pendlebury Centre PRU.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How is existing research being utilised to improve knowledge and practice?

- Are there examples of innovations being developed and shared by staff to improve practice?

- Is there evidence of the positive impact of research and innovation being shared with other schools or settings?

- Are staff leading or contributing to research projects?

Curriculum

Curriculum accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, the quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5. Pupil induction
6. Attendance and engagement
7. Supporting pupils' needs
8. Quality of education

5. Pupil induction

A robust induction process that increases understanding of pupils' backgrounds and needs, supports decision-making and facilitates the development of positive relationships.

5.1. Smooth and structured starts

Pupil induction refers to the way pupils are supported to transition into school and start smoothly[77]. The induction process begins when the AP school first receives information about a prospective pupil and is centred on the building of positive relationships with the pupil, their parent(s) or carer(s) and other professionals who work with them.

In April 2021, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for school exclusions and alternative provision, heard from Mark Vickers MBE who explained the importance of having well planned and high-quality induction programmes which gather information through conversations and are centred around the needs and previous experiences of pupils, providing an opportunity to build on their strengths.[78]

When done effectively, induction programmes can ensure a smooth transition[79] in AP and can increase the likelihood of interventions and actions taken by teachers and other staff being successful. This is acknowledged by Ofsted whose inspectors consider the ways in which leaders have identified, assessed and met the needs of pupils.[80] However, it is unclear how Ofsted currently examine this within alternative provision settings.

Getting to know parents and carers during the induction process can help to ensure positive parental engagement throughout the placement, as outlined in Home and Family Engagement (2), this is crucially important for children's success and progress at school.

Professor Damien Page's research into Family Engagement in AP found that 'induction offered an opportunity to collect contextual details. In some instances, this was enacted through conversational strategies; in others, a life history approach was adopted with questions about birth stories, adverse childhood experiences and parental educational background. What was key was the understanding of the fragility of family engagement from the outset: whatever was promised had to be delivered or the tenuous early collaboration would be damaged'.[81]

5.2. Gathering information

Another fundamental aspect of effective pupil induction is identifying and assessing pupils' needs. Numerous research sources included within the DfE's 2017 Alternative Provision: Effective Practice and Post 16 Transition report emphasised that effective provision requires flexibility and a philosophy of adapting the educational approach to meet the pupils' needs rather than seeking to change the young person to fit a predetermined approach.[82]

Whilst being informed by the information provided by the local authority or referring school, AP schools and providers who take a fresh start approach[83] can identify needs that may have been previously undiagnosed or unmet. The issue of previously undiagnosed needs will be explored in greater depth in supporting pupils' needs (7b).

AP leaders told us…

That the reality is that all too often they receive insufficient or outdated information about pupils' prior progress, family context and needs profiles[84]. Key information relating to safeguarding, mental health or special needs are not always shared in appropriate detail.

Some also shared concerns that in some cases commissioners, such as local schools, may intentionally omit information from referral forms in an effort to increase a pupil's prospects of gaining a dual-registration place in AP.

The lack of effective information sharing creates further risks to pupils[85] and the induction process is one way AP schools and providers seek to mitigate these risks. Effective induction processes include assessments of pupils' academic levels often referred to baselines[86] as well as age-appropriate conversations about progression and career aspirations[87]. As information is gathered and relationships between the pupil and key staff are formed, a personalised learning plan can be created. This should include their curriculum, pastoral support, SEND and learning support and any other aspects pertinent to the individual. Although there can be pressure to get new pupils into school, some AP leaders opt for phased starts with interim check-in points[88]. This can be particularly helpful for pupils with historically severe absence levels, low self-confidence or for those who are likely to find the transition process difficult socially and emotionally[89]. Phased starts can also help to build trust with parents and allow pupils to settle in.[90]

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: London East Alternative Provision

At LEAP, the induction process begins at the point of referral, to ensure that the right support is put in place from day one.

As soon as a referral comes through, LEAP reviews the referring school's supporting documentation and calls to Social Care and Youth Offending Teams are carried out to check whether the pupil is registered with either of these agencies. This information is used to create an initial Pupil Profile. Pupils with specific vulnerabilities e.g., SEND, child protection orders or mental health-related concerns are flagged internally to the relevant stakeholders e.g. the SENCo, Child Protection Officer or the on-site Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinician.

LEAP staff use the week prior to the student's arrival to gather any additional information about the pupil, their particular needs and their family context. Induction meetings take place on Mondays, where the student, parents/carers and other relevant agencies are invited to attend and the necessary paperwork, medical forms, and other processes are explained. Pupils/parents are also invited to contribute to the Pupil Profile. Tuesday through Thursday is dedicated to assessing pupils' cognitive skills (including maths and English) and emotional wellbeing and then allocating them to the right pathway. Finally, on Friday, the pupil and their parents/carers are invited for an intake interview ahead of their first full day on the following Monday.

Carrying out the induction process in this way allows LEAP to ascertain each new pupil's level of need and to allocate them to the right educational and therapeutic pathways. Students immediately receive personalised pastoral and academic support as teachers, teaching assistants and support workers' understanding of their needs is informed by the wealth of information gathered during the induction phase.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- Is there a detailed understanding of pupils' prior learning, academic needs, and risk factors before they attend lessons?

- Are all key stakeholders (pupil, family, previous school, relevant agencies) engaged with during the induction process?

- How, when and to who is information about new students shared?

- What evidence is there to indicate that the pupil induction process is fit for purpose?

Curriculum accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, the quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5. Pupil induction

6. Attendance and engagement

7. Supporting pupils' needs

8. Quality of education

6. Attendance and engagement

The culture and systems of attendance and engagement that ensure high aspirations for pupils, timely interventions and sustained improvement over time.

6.1. Systemic sector challenges

Achieving consistently high attendance levels is a significant challenge for AP schools and providers. Not least because low attendance is one of the factors associated with pupils' exclusion from mainstream school.[91] On average, nationally pupils are absent from state-maintained AP 33 per cent of the time, compared to 4 per cent in mainstream schools.[92]

Severe absence means that pupils are more often absent than they are present. Information obtained by the Centre for Social Justice via a Freedom of Information Request showed 'that 29.9% of pupils in AP were severely absent in the academic year 2018/19. Over the same period, 1.3% of pupils in secondary mainstream schools were severely absent.'[93]

The Centre for Social Justice found that 'in four LAs pupils are absent more often than they are present'.[94] 'In a further 28 LAs, pupils are absent at least 40 per cent of the time; this equates roughly to pupils missing two days out of every five-day school week. In the best performing LA, the attendance rate for pupils in state-maintained AP is 84 per cent'.[95]

AP settings are likely to educate some pupils with mental health needs ranging from mild to moderate. The 2021 NHS Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey found that children with a probable mental disorder were twice as likely to have missed more than 15 days of school during the 2020 Autumn term, than those unlikely to have a mental disorder.[96]

As pupils transition from mainstream to AP, there is a heightened risk of poor attendance. Some pupils have a gap in school-based provision and therefore, lose the routine and rhythm of getting up and ready for school. Social Finance's research found that 'pupil attendance often deteriorates in the run-up to a formal exclusion or a school move'[97] Periods of non-attendance can add complexity to the transition process[98]. Pupils can become disengaged and disenfranchised with education during the final stages of their time in mainstream school, or because of how they feel they have been treated during the exclusion or referral process. These experiential factors can also affect parents and impact the important role they play in getting their child to school. Some parents and pupils describe feelings of anxiety and stigma prior to starting in AP, especially in cases of permanent exclusion. Parents can feel alienated and disempowered during the exclusion/referral and transition process particularly when there is a lack of support and communication from the mainstream school[99]. In all cases, the development of strong relationships between school and pupil and school and home are crucial for securing trust and improving attendance.

About cases where pupils were required to travel extremely long distances to and from school each day. One example included a pupil travelling via taxi from over 35 miles each day due to the lack of appropriate provision closer to home.

For some pupils the distance they travel to school provides an additional geographical and logistical barrier, which can also impact on their attendance and punctuality. Furthermore, in some areas, it heightens the risk to pupil safety, through potential involvement in anti-social behaviour or criminal exploitation.

When AP pupils attend school and engage positively, they are safe from harm, diverted away from negative behaviours and supported to learn and develop. Attendance is key to safeguarding pupils and helping them to gain the skills

and qualifications they need to progress to the next stage of education.[100] This quality area is therefore, closely linked with quality of education (8), personal development (9), and post-16 destinations (13).

Some of our pupils have significant responsibilities at home, such as caring for younger siblings, others may have the opportunity to work with older friends or family members and some are at risk of missing school due to being encouraged to participate in anti-social behaviour or due to criminal exploitation.

A safe and welcoming school environment with a tailored curriculum and an exciting enrichment programme, as well as positive relationships with members of staff, can create a 'pull factor' for pupils to attend school.

When pupils attend school and feel a sense of enjoyment and achievement, it increases their appetite for learning and provides a greater desire to attend school – thus reinforcing a positive attendance and engagement cycle.

6.2. Effective attendance strategies

The DfE outline the principles for effective whole school attendance as, leadership and management, relationships and communication, systems and data and intervention.[101] Similarly, our research with AP sector leaders identified the following principles of effective attendance strategies:

1. Robust attendance data tracking and monitoring systems.

2. Incentives, rewards or recognition for good attendance and progress towards it.

3. Building positive relationships with pupils to explore and address barriers to attendance.

4. Processes that are consistently followed to address below expected attendance.

6.3. Tracking and monitoring attendance data

This includes efficient central systems which are updated in a timely fashion, as well as tracking and monitoring undertaken by staff to identify patterns of attendance and possible issues as they arise. If pupils are not in attendance, it is crucial from a safeguarding and welfare perspective that relevant stakeholders are aware, and that any non-attendance is followed up.

Tracking and monitoring allows patterns of absence to be scrutinised and then targeted interventions to be put in place. It also allows schools to monitor the effectiveness of any interventions they are putting in place to improve attendance and readjust as necessary.[102]

6.4. Incentives, rewards and recognition

Encouragements and exhortations can be effectively used when employed by staff who have positive relationships with pupils. Examples of practice we found during our research included, weekly awards given out during assemblies or form time, positive postcards and phone calls home and prize draws to win vouchers or item. Some schools and providers also ran rewards trips to places like theme parks, cinemas and bowling alleys for pupils with high-levels or improved levels of attendance and engagement.

Receiving recognition for their achievements is something that some AP pupils have not previously been accustomed to. Therefore, the acknowledgement of their efforts, progress and achievement can boost their confidence and sense of self-worth, which can further improve their attendance and engagement. The experiential incentives also create opportunities for pupils to have fun and build relationships with staff in different, new environments.

6.5. Exploring and addressing barriers

Pupils' attainment and life chances improve through regular and consistent school attendance; the inverse is also true. Absence has a statistically significant negative link to attainment, with every extra school day missed increasing the probability of lower attainment outcomes.[103] Therefore, it is important to quickly and tactfully intervene when patterns of non-attendance or inconsistent attendance emerge. AP pupils may be absent from school due to several factors such as a lack of motivation, social anxiety or low confidence levels, circumstances at home, substance misuse or involvement in anti-social or criminal activity.

AP schools and providers can leverage the relationships they have with pupils and their parents and carers to gain a better understanding of the issues behind disengagement and non-attendance. Through conversations, teachers, mentors and attendance staff can identify barriers and work towards breaking them down.

This tailored and intensive work, which may include home visits, is crucial to the effective management and improvement of attendance. The addressing of barriers to attendance can include a variety of actions. Examples found during our research included, arranging and/or funding transportation, helping to structure pupils' bedtime and morning routines, resolving friendship issues with peers, adjusting timetables to allative anxieties and liaising with parents and careers to bolster support at home.

There is also opportunity to draw on external support in order to get pupils back into school and ready to learn. For example, some AP settings work with School-Home Support[104], a charity that works with children and families to maximise educational opportunities and improve life chances.

6.6. Consistent processes

Having clear processes in place increased the likelihood of staff acting in a timely and consistent manner. Consistent and systematic processes can also ensure that attendance and engagement issues are not overlooked or misunderstand – increasing the probability of issues being resolved and attendance being improved over time.

It can often be the case that pupils and their parents/carers can have a mistrust or scepticism about education professionals, which sometimes stems from previous experiences of the education system or exclusion/referral processes. This heightens the need for schools and providers to have clear and consistent processes that are followed to support each pupil. This type of fairness and reliability can build parent/carer confidence in the intentions and approach taken by the school or provider.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: The Rowans AP Academy

The Rowans AP Academy adopts a firm and structured approach to attendance which includes rigorous monitoring, regular familial communication, careers support, rewards and extra-curricular activities.

The school communicates with parents and carers to convey the effects of poor attendance on their child's educational attainment and personal wellbeing. The Rowans AP Academy undertakes home visits to each of its pupils and parents/carers, including to year 11s, where career aspirations and conversations about next steps are used to motivate pupils to attend and engage at school.

Incentivisation is used to encourage consistent attendance. They regularly celebrate attendance in weekly assemblies, including the awarding of the 'Attendance Star of the week', who receives a certificate for their endeavours.

There is a house system, driven by the awarding of points, given in return for a pupil's adherence to the school's values. Pupils modelling good behaviour may also be offered the opportunity to be a 'Head of House'.

The combination of high expectations, clear communication with parents and incentives for pupils lead to high attendance; 83.97% in 2019/20. Also, in 2019, 87.5% of those in year 11 at the Rowans AP Academy achieved 5 or more qualifications, including English and maths. This is notable when compared to the national AP and PRU cohort figure of 12.3%.

Crucially, all pupils develop an enormous sense of belonging at The Rowans, they take pride in their attendance and engagement, which further supports them to develop core values and become further rooted within the school community.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- What systems are used to ensure regular attendance?

- Are there demonstratable improvements in pupils' attendance? If not, what are the reasons for this?

- Specifically, how do/will students be supported with persistent absenteeism?

- How are levels of pupil engagement and motivation increased?

Curriculum accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, the quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5. Pupil induction

6. Attendance and engagement

7. Supporting pupils' needs

8. Quality of education

7. Supporting pupils' needs

Building relationships and understanding and adeptly supporting pupil needs including their literacy, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Many educators and child development experts argue that the overarching goal of education is to promote the highest possible levels of cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and ethical development for each child[105]. To work towards this educational goal and prepare pupils for successful futures, it is necessary to identify their starting points and needs.

Pupils in AP are likely to require a wider range and higher intensity of support than is typically offered in mainstream. AP pupil cohorts often fluctuate in size due to exclusions, referrals, movement to other settings and the transient nature of some pupil groups. 43% of AP placements have a duration of between one term and one academic year, 32% last for more than a year and 23% for a term or less.[106] This results in an ever-evolving profile of needs, vulnerabilities, and risks across each setting. For example, AP schools and providers have varying and changing proportions of pupils who are persistently absent, require social, emotional and behavioural support, have an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and criminal exploitation.

Alternative Provision is also accessed by and used to support pupils with medical needs who are unable to attend school due to physical and/or mental health difficulties. This could be within a hospital school, medical Pupil Referral Unit, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) inpatient unit or as part of an outreach service such as home tuition.[107]

AP schools and providers work with pupils who have a significant and diverse range of needs. These include Special Education Needs and Disabilities, learning, safeguarding and physical and mental health needs. The types of needs AP schools and providers encounter can vary due to a wide range of context specific factors including:

• The type of support and educational provision they offer.

• The availability of special school places in the surrounding area.[108]

• The inclusiveness and capacity of local mainstream schools to support pupils with high levels of need.

• Local Authority placement policies and practice.

• The general needs profiles of pupils in their locality.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for school exclusions and alternative provision discussed this quality area during their April 2021 meeting. AP 'needs to be flexible, personalised and child-centred. It needs to get underneath the skin of child's stories and understand what it is that's brought them to us, what those barriers might be, the things they've experienced and what their strengths are... The outcomes we try to achieve have to be of the highest order and have to be driven by the needs of our pupils'.[109]

AP leaders told us...

That they feel it is important to use the information provided to them by commissioners and previous schools, as well as conduct their own assessment of pupils' needs. This enables them to paint a fuller picture which often includes the identification of issues and needs that have previously gone unnoticed. The assessment of needs considers learning as well as other personal and social needs.

A strong theme within AP research is the prevalence of previously unidentified and unmet needs. Pupil behaviours can at times initially be labelled as a social, emotional and mental health need (SEMH), however, further assessment can reveal underlying and unmet communication and interaction or learning needs.[110] Effective assessment practice identifies all needs and provides information that can help to calibrate support both now and in the future. Assessment of Need (11) will explore how, equipping pupils, parents/carers and other educational professionals with information about pupils' needs can aid successful transition and future achievement.

a) Literacy

Supporting literacy needs is a significant challenge within AP schools and providers. Reading assessments in AP often show that pupils have reading ages which are well below their chronological age, often due to missed learning, disengagement or other underlying needs.

AP leaders told us...

They often find correlations between pupils' low literacy levels, their inability to access a mainstream curriculum and the subsequent manifestation of the types of negative behaviours which resulted in them being excluded.

International research into the language skills of children with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD) found that 71% formally identified with EBD experienced clinically significant language deficits and 57% of children with diagnosed language deficits were also identified with EBD.[112]

The Social Mobility Commission argue that developing pupils' literacy skills is important in the long-term because basic levels of literacy and numeracy are necessary for gaining 'semi-skilled employment, apprenticeships and training'.[113] Literacy skills enable children and young adults to develop self-agency and be able to navigate the world safely and with dignity. From an educational perspective, these skills are also crucial in the short-medium term as they unlock access to higher level learning, broader curriculum experiences and reduce the risk of disengagement.

Effective assessment of needs begins during pupil induction (5) and continues as an ongoing process that continues throughout a pupil's placement in AP. The turbulence in the lives of many pupils means that needs can change considerably throughout the year. Therefore, it is crucial to have systems and actions in place that recognise, identify and address these changing needs.[111]

Effective assessment practice identifies

all needs and provides information that can help to calibrate support both now and in the future

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Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: Educational Diversity

Educational Diversity has adopted whole-school approaches to meeting reading and speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN).

Educational Diversity joined the KS3 Blackpool Literacy Strategy (facilitated by Right to Succeed) two years ago having identified that many of their students had huge gaps in their learning – particularly regarding literacy and reading. Pupils often joined the PRU with reading ages well below their chronological ages. And, in 2012, a SLCN audit revealed that 100% of learners in KS2, 97% of learners in KS3 and 86% of learners in KS4 had an unmet or undiagnosed need.

The Opportunity Area-wide literacy strategy aims to systematically enhance the abilities of KS3 students through a series of interventions designed to increase fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Data relating to reading and literacy is collected three times per year to monitor progress and identify students who require additional intervention support. Assessment tools used include the New Group Reading Test (NGRT) which measures student's standard age scores and gaps, Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) which measures and monitors fundamental reading, spelling, and maths skills and English Progress Tests which assesses technical English skills.

The PRU utilises whole-school approaches including explicit teaching of vocabulary e.g. 'word of the week', dedicated whole-school reading time and regular trips to the library, a number of reading interventions such as Accelerated Reader (a reading practice software) and Lexonik (a reading teaching programme) to further support reading skills. In 2018, Educational Diversity was awarded 'Whole School Communication Friendly Status' by Elklan (national leaders in speech and language training).

Teachers report improved NGRT reading ages, improved student confidence and enjoyment (e.g. willingness to read aloud in class as well as independent reading), and better engagement with the curriculum.

In Blackpool, place-based change charity Right to Succeed is facilitating a town-wide literacy programme, testing the hypothesis that by improving literacy, attitudes to learning and engagement with the curriculum will improve and school exclusions will decrease.[114]

Pupils in AP are almost six times as likely to have SEND than children in mainstream schools. Statistics show that 81% of pupils in AP are on the SEND register compared to 14% in mainstream.[115] Some professionals within the sector share the view that all their pupils have some form of additional needs, which precipitate their need for alternative provision. The following data illustration from FFT Education Datalab's research shows the overlap between groups of pupils a) with special educational needs (SEN), b) who have been referred to social services and c) who attend alternative provision[116].

In some areas a lack of capacity within special schools has led to an increase in pupils with more complex needs being placed in AP. This not only poses additional challenges to the schools affected but also points to structural problems within the wider education eco-system.

Number of pupils (thousands) accessing alternative provision, referred for a CIN assessment and identified as having SEN up to age 16
Cohort born in 2002/03

Alternative Provision 2
1
7
15
CIN referral 47
68
SEN 157
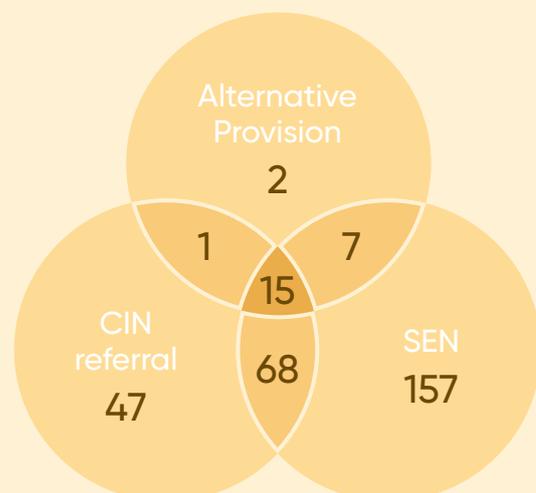
That as a result of the high prevalence of SEND within the AP pupil cohort, their settings are often required to function as centres of expert SEND assessment and referral. In addition, some leaders shared that they are increasingly being required to support pupils with more complex needs due to a lack of availability of local specialist provision.

Martin and White believe that successful alternative provision for young people with SEN focuses on the individual needs and interests of pupils as well as their achievement of realistic and meaningful outcomes.[117]

When pupils are placed in AP, schools and providers are required to learn about and understand their needs at a rapid pace. This challenge is intensified by the fact that pupils may have previously undiagnosed needs. For the majority of pupils SEN identification tends to take place several years before entering AP, however, data analysed by FFT Education Datalab shows 'a spike where the two events coincide in the same year. This would suggest being classified as SEN for the first time on entering the AP sector.'[118]

'Schools must have a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN, identifying needs at the earliest point can improve long-term outcomes, including Speech, Language and Communication Needs, social, emotional and mental health needs'.[119] To suitably support pupil needs, the learning environment, curriculum and approach taken by staff must all be carefully calibrated. AP schools and providers who provide robust support for pupils with SEND have a foundation of whole-school inclusive practices and have embedded the components of great teaching[120]. Beyond this, they employ specific strategies targeted to meet specific needs and they plan highly personalised specialist interventions for individual pupils.

The dynamic nature of pupil cohorts and their need-profiles means that practice in this quality area cannot remain static. To maintain relevance and effectiveness, AP schools and providers must continually assess, evaluate and reflect on the extent to which pupils SEND are being met.

'Despite SEND needs increasing some AP schools and providers lack the staff, resources and specialist training to do this effectively and consistently'[121].

c) Health and wellbeing

The Children's Society found that in 2021 almost 12% of all children have low wellbeing.[122]

Pupils' physical and mental health and wellbeing should be a priority for all education settings. The latest NHS Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey indicates that:

- Rates of probable mental disorders have increased since 2017; in 6 to 16 year olds from one in nine (11.6%) to one in six (17.4%),

- 39.2% of 6 to 16 year olds had experienced deterioration in mental health since 2017, and 21.8% experienced improvement.

- The proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems increased since 2017; from 6.7% to 13.0% in 11 to 16 year olds

- Problems with sleep on three or more nights of the previous seven affected over a quarter (28.7%) of 6 to 10 year olds and over a third (38.4%) of 11 to 16 year olds.[123]

AP pupils are likely to have a multiplicity of vulnerabilities and face disadvantage which can impact their mental health, impede healthy lifestyles and hinder access to services that support wellness.

That it is impossible to educate a pupil whose basic needs are not being met. In some cases, students are supported by being given access to food, clothing, mental health support and quite simply a safe place to be.

As emotional wellbeing is a pre-condition for learning, then it is essential that pupils experience a sense of belonging with adults who know them best at school.

AP schools and providers have a role to play to ensure that what they offer supports health and wellbeing and that they create opportunities for young people to access additional external support. Examples of effective practice in this area include schools hosting NHS drop-in sexual health clinics, encouraging participation in extra-curricular sport and exercise, serving pupils with and educating them about nutritious meals and building trusting relationships that enable pupils to talk about difficulties they are facing.

'The Good Childhood Report 2021 draws attention to the potential value of regularly monitoring children's well-being using a simple, single question on life satisfaction (which is relatively non-intrusive) to identify children who might be experiencing issues in their life that they need support with.'[124]

Pupils with mental health problems are more likely to be excluded and poor adolescent mental health can have a detrimental impact on wellbeing and learning. Some pupils have longstanding SEMH needs, and some have mental health problems triggered or exacerbated by the exclusion process.[125] The primary special need for four in five students with identified SEND is social, emotional and mental health (SEMH).[126] Therefore, particularly close attention should be paid to supporting students' mental health as well as mitigating against aspects of school life that may cause stress or be negatively impact pupils' mental wellbeing. For example, consideration should be given to pupils' experiences of the induction process, arriving to school in the morning, how inappropriate behaviour is addressed, disruption and changes to usual routines, the introduction of new pupils, topics and subjects that pupils find particularly difficult as well as assessments and exams. Schools who are focussed on this quality area consider their pupils' collective and individual experiences when evaluating practice and introducing new school initiatives.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: Northamptonshire Hospital and Outreach Education (NHOE) AP Academy

The Hospital and Outreach Education AP Academy ensures that its staff intentionally listen to pupils, mentor them and focus on creating a positive ethos within the school.

A focus and awareness of wellbeing is embedded in all aspects of school life. When pupils arrive in school, they are individually greeted and engaged with by staff, who encouragingly guide them into school. These conversations provide an opportunity to discuss topical issues, interests and hobbies and any personal challenges that pupils might be facing. This allows staff to identify and address any issues as they arise.

Pupils and staff spend breaktimes together, for example, over tea and toast in the mornings. Relationships are nurtured by staff – as 'active listeners' and behavioural role-models – through informal conversations and break time activities such as board games, which encourage pupils to express themselves and interact socially.

Teachers plan and deliver lessons in a way that is considerate of pupils' emotions and the impact particular topics and learning experiences may have on them. In addition, support staff have regular mentoring sessions with the pupils, to discuss how they are feeling as well as their educational progress. Information about nutrition, healthy sleeping patterns, as well as protective behaviours, is offered, with this information being relayed back to the parents and carers, to consolidate the practice of these techniques.

Everything that NHOE AP Academy does strives to provide pupils with a sense of belonging and a solid foundation of self-confidence, self-regulation and self-management skills. This approach increases their likelihood of success in post-16 education and in future life.

In 2021, The Times, shortlisted the school for its 'Educational Supplement Alternative Provision of the Year'.

Curriculum– 7. Supporting pupils' needs

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- Literacy: How are pupils supported to improve their reading and literacy skills?

- SEND: What is the process for assessing and understanding pupils' SEND needs?

- SEND: How does the attendance, personal development, and attainment of pupils with SEND compare to their non-SEND peers?

- Health and wellbeing: How are students supported to improve their health and wellbeing?

Curriculum accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, the quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5. Pupil induction

6. Attendance and engagement

7. Supporting pupils' needs

8. Quality of education

8. Quality of education

A well-planned, broad, ambitious and tailored curriculum that enables pupils to learn, progress and develop in preparation for their next stage of education, employment or training.

A high-quality well-rounded education is a crucial determinate in pupils' future life chances. The curriculum should give pupils everything they need in order 'to take advantage of the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life, and by doing so can address aspects of social disadvantage'.[127]

The Ofsted School Inspection handbook refers to 'the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.'[128]

An effectively planned and delivered curriculum includes exposure to a range of learning experiences beyond timetabled lessons. AP schools and providers with quality practice in this area enable their pupils to grow as individuals, access further education, and succeed in employment and future life.

AP leaders told us...

That they often adapt their curriculum and education offer to suit the needs and interests of their pupils. One AP academy that only educates Year 10 and 11 pupils shared that every year 50% of their pupil cohort move on to post-16 and are replaced by new students. This requires them to be adaptable and responsive as what worked last year may not be as effective with the new group of students who have different prior knowledge strengths and gaps, learning and support needs and aspirations for the future.

Curricula should be well-planned, broad, ambitious and tailored to the specific needs of pupils. It would be foolhardy to suggest the prescription of be a particular type of curriculum for all AP schools and providers. The unique purposes, functions and pupil cohorts of AP schools and providers vary greatly, therefore, their curricular should also reflect these differences.

From our research emerged the following principles of high-quality education for AP pupils:

- The importance of the acquisition of English and maths knowledge, skills and qualifications. The necessity to ensure that this does not come at the cost of diminished focus on other subjects and other aspects of learning.

- The opportunity to study meaningful and credible subjects, courses and qualifications.

- The curriculum should be designed to meet the varied needs of all learners.

- It should address risk factors, gaps in learning and pupil aspirations, as identified through dialogue with the child and triangulated with mainstream school and others stakeholders.

- Curriculum sequencing should take account of the fact that many pupils are likely to join mid-year.

- Assessment should be used to assess starting points and measure the progress of pupils, including those who leave AP prior to the end of year 11.

- The curriculum should lead to positive pupil outcomes in progress, attainment, basic skills, personal development, engagement, attendance, transitions and destinations.

Personal development (9) should not be regarded as an appendage to the curriculum. Ofsted expects the curriculum to extend 'beyond the academic, technical or vocational' to enable pupils to 'develop and discover their interests and talents', 'develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy'.[129] An effective pupil induction (5) will enable schools to plan an appropriate and aspirational curriculum, that meets the individual needs of pupils.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: Westside School

Westside School offers a high-quality education to its pupils by tailoring its provision, to their needs. They have 'moved from differentiation to personalisation'.

During integration, Westside School's teachers meet with the referring school and seek as much information as possible. Findings from a pupil-led interview with Westside's headteacher, Patricia Hanley, feed into the creation of a tailored education plan. Staff then plan and discuss how they can ensure the qualifications previously studied by the pupil at their previous school can be continued. To ensure that new pupils settle well in school a review is conducted after the first fortnight.

Westside School's staff pride themselves on understanding the nuanced needs of every pupil. Teacher assessments inform bespoke curricula, that allow a continuation of learning and for skills and knowledge gaps to be filled. The school hires teachers and tutors – for example, in GCSE Business Studies, GCSE French and GCSE Arabic – to facilitate the breath of needs and ambitions of their pupils. Learning reviews are carried out and any necessary adjustments are made on a half-termly basis.

To prepare pupils for further education and the world of work, the school intertwines specialist vocabulary – relevant to the career paths that its pupils are interested in – into its reading schemes. For example, lexical references are made to motor vehicle systems, design and technology, as well as hairdressing and beauty therapy.

Pupils requiring one-to-one support are supported by teaching assistants, often in separate learning spaces. Pupils aspire to be successful at school and in their future careers. Post-16 education and workplace destinations range from motor mechanics and business management to hospitality and animal care, and some have undertaken the International Baccalaureate, before progressing onto university.

The school encourages pupils to engage in a wide range of activities such as trips to the theatre, galleries and museums, joining the 'Junior Leadership Team' or participating in sport. To increase engagement and maximise participation, Westside School are always developing their offer. Pupils have recently sought to improve their culinary skills, so cookery, with the school cook, is now offered as an after-school enrichment opportunity.

The school was judged 'Outstanding' in its most recent Ofsted inspection. 60% of Westside School's pupils achieved a 4 or above in both GCSE English and GCSE maths in 2020 and their pupils pursue further study and careers in a wide range of industries.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How does the education you provide set students up for success in the future?

- How do you tailor the curriculum to support the specific learning needs of individual pupils?

- How do you incorporate diverse viewpoints and perspectives when developing pupils' cultural capital?

- How well prepared are pupils/students for the next stage of learning, education or training?

Currency

Currency focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

9. Personal development
10. Qualifications
11. Assessment of need
12. Appropriate transition
13. Post-16 destinations

9. Personal development

The provision of opportunities and support to develop the behaviours, skills and character necessary for pupils' current and future success, including resilience, confidence, self-management and teamwork.

9.1. Systemic sector challenges

In addition to pre-existing needs, pupils may have been de-socialised by a period of school absence or may have been negatively affected by the exclusion or referral process.

'Sequences of exclusions, alternative provision and school placement transfers… are often punctuated with significant episodes of non-attendance and part-time attendance'.[130]

9.2. Tailored support

Due to a variety of factors, pupils in AP are likely to require significant support in at least one area of their personal development. Each pupil will have a unique background and needs profile. Therefore, their personal development goals and their curriculum should be planned and delivered with the aim of addressing and supporting pupils' need (7).

Some AP schools and providers are adept at creating environments and opportunities that develop pupils' personal skills and competencies. This is supported by the DfE who state that 'many children are supported to make rapid social, emotional and educational progress whilst in AP'.[131] However, some teachers feel that there continues to be a proportion of pupils who move on from AP education without the requisite skills 'to cope with mainstream life'.[132]

9.3. Developing pupils for the future

Paying attention to personal development is necessary to unlock pupils' learning potential and prepare them for their futures. Key aspects of personal development are pupils' abilities to manage their emotions and to build and maintain healthy relationships with peers and members of staff. Interestingly, pupils themselves often relate the progress that they made in the AP, to feeling "more confident"', both in terms of their future prospects and in their ability to interact with adults and other pupils.[133]

There has been significant research undertaken in the areas of personal development and social and emotional learning. Here are some examples of their cited implications and benefits. For example, The OECD state that 'Social and emotional skills play an important role in the development of children and adolescents and, combined with academic achievement and cognitive skills, represent a holistic set of skills essential for success at school and later life. But social and emotional skills are more than simply enablers of cognitive and academic growth; they are an important developmental outcome in their own right'.[134]

The Learning Policy Institute found that 'emotions and social relationships affect learning. Positive emotions, such as interest and excitement, open up the mind to learning. Negative emotions, such as fear of failure, anxiety, and self-doubt, reduce the capacity of the brain to process information and to learn'.[135] In reference to personal development they also found that interpersonal skills, including their ability to interact positively with peers and adults, to resolve conflicts, and to work in teams, all contribute to effective learning. 'These skills, which build on the development of empathy, awareness of one's own and others' feelings, and learned skills for communication and problem solving, can be taught'.[136]

9.4. Creating opportunities

Schools with effective practice in this area have discrete opportunities for personal development such as mentoring and enrichment whilst ensuring that personal development is a consistent thread throughout the curriculum and all aspects of school life. Many AP schools and providers also forge partnerships with external organisations, to bolster the breath, diversity and specificity of their offer.

AP leaders told us...

We partner with local organisations who can provide activities for our pupils either on-site or elsewhere. These included boxing classes at a local gymnasium, fishing, art therapy, basketball with players from a local team and music technology sessions with a college lecturer. These opportunities enable students to learn and practise vital personal skills and competencies such as teamwork, resilience and communication.

We also utilise the passions and hobbies of staff members to bolster our enrichment and after-school programmes – staff enjoy the chance to get pupils involved and pupils really benefit from seeing their teachers and mentors in a different light. These shared experiences and activities can strengthen relationships that carry over into the classroom.

9.5. Measuring personal development

There is a challenge associated with the personal development aspect of AP practice. Most notably, it is not how to undertake the work itself but, rather, how to measure its impact and the gains that pupils make. Monitoring progress and finding suitable measures for aspects of personal development such as social emotional learning, resilience, engagement and confidence can be difficult.[137] This issue is felt acutely by settings whose pupils have a short placement length, and even more so by settings who do not have formal qualifications to rely on as general indicators of success, for example Key Stage 3 only settings.

The challenges of assessing and monitoring pupils' personal development are not insurmountable, nor should they justify the neglection of this aspect of learning. For example, personal development can be defined across a diversity of pupils and contexts and accurate measures can be developed, measures can be used to make these critical skills visible and progress within them trackable, in a similar way that traditional assessments do with academic knowledge.[138]

Here are a range of successful approaches employed to overcome these challenges collated from the following schools: Aspire AP, The Academy of Central Bedfordshire, London East Alternative Provision and ACE schools.

- Prioritising the identification of personal development needs during induction and planning how to support them most effectively. This includes reviewing all documentation (Children's Social Care, education history, CAMHS, therapeutic input, family history and medical history) and working 1-2-1 with pupils to pull together a detailed picture on all their needs.

- Using referral information to shape the PSHE curriculum to be more individual and proactive in meeting pupils' personal development needs.

- Pupils Attitudes to Self and Schools (PASS) survey on entry and at key points to review the impact of everything the school does on students' attitudes to themselves and their learning as well as plan interventions.

- Using the Boxall Profile to assess pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs and development, including their self-esteem and self-regard.

- A holistic approach with regards to academic, behaviour, attendance and engagement data which utilises pre-admission information, baseline assessments on entry and half-termly progress reviews where personal development targets are set, and support strategies are developed.

- SEND support plans for all students where holistic targets including those for personal development are recorded for students to work towards over time.

- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which asks about 25 attributes including emotions, conduct, hyperactivity and peer relationships.

- Behaviour for Learning tracking: identifying the 2 main behaviours that most significantly impact each pupil's learning, including wellbeing and personal development aspects. Key workers are responsible for working with students to address these behaviours and progress is tracked through regular meetings.

- Assessments within the Personal, Social, Health and Relationships Education (PSHRE) curriculum, at the start and end of each unit. Pupil progress tracking along a mastery framework (Acquiring, Developing, Secure, Exceeding).

- Portfolio based qualifications that provide the opportunity to track and monitor different aspects of personal development as well as allow students to experience success and feel their work is appreciated and accredited.

- Supporting students to keep a record of the extra-curricular activities they are involved in and the skills they have developed in the process.

- Through the careers programme, monitoring progress in terms of pupils' aspirations and readiness for work in comparison to their starting points.

Due to the myriad of risk factors previously outlined, without the prioritisation of personal development, AP pupils can be in danger of entering into early adulthood without the skills required to have a successful future and the ability to contribute positively to society. Personal development is a fundamental component of a high-quality education for AP pupils.

Currency – 9. Personal development

Example of practice: Harmonize Academy

Harmonize Academy promotes pupils' personal development through its extensive and inclusive, academic, careers and enrichment curricula.

They have created a rigorous curriculum that focuses on problem-solving, helping both their self and peer leadership skillsets. Harmonize seek to build pupil's skills and character whilst also equipping them with subject specific knowledge and technical skills.

All pupils study core subjects in English, mathematics and science, as well as PSHE, Oracy and PE. The stretching compulsory offering is designed to raise aspirations and generate an atmosphere of self-perpetuating, peer-to-peer motivation. Their 2020 Ofsted inspection report stated that current 'pupils want to emulate former attendees' achievements'.

Pupils receive independent and impartial careers advice and guidance allowing them to take ownership of their future plans and become well-informed decision-makers; Year 10 and 11 pupils are exposed to a broad range of options for further education and training, current pupil aspirations include Performing Arts, Music Technology, Food Technology, Chemistry, Psychology, Childcare, Beauty, Design Technology, Statistics and Physical Education.

Harmonize provides daily enrichment opportunities suited to its pupils' needs and these are often used to motivate students who are at risk of disengagement. They offer a wide range of options to broaden pupils' horizons and promote these as ways for pupils to become 'the best version of themselves'. Their enrichment curriculum includes beauty therapy, catering, dance, gospel singing, guitar and drum lessons, film, photography, rap/poetry, free-running and horse-riding. Pupils are eager to learn new things and develop as the enrichment programme allows them to obtain skills and qualifications in areas they enjoy. The Archbishop of York Youth Trust 'Young Leaders Award' is one example of community engagement. Pupils describe their experience at Harmonize Academy as 'the best thing ever'.

Tolerance and acceptance are developed as important themes alongside the Academy's values of trust, respect, compassion and forgiveness. The Academy has organised guest speaker sessions that draw on the experiences of members of the local community, including a trauma surgeon and asylum seekers. The former outlined the dangers of knife crime, the latter the importance of social inclusivity. These types of sessions are particularly powerful and impactful in developing pupils' understanding of themselves and others. In the 2019-2020 academic year, the 2020 inspection report, stated that the school's 'personal development programme was well considered' and more than 80% of their pupils gained five or more GCSEs.

Evaluative questions

- How does your curriculum enable students to better lead themselves and others?

- To what extent, do you provide a range of opportunities that are suited to the needs of your pupils?

- To what extent are pupils eager to learn new things and develop personally?

- How do you promote tolerance and acceptance within your school community?

Currency – 10. Qualifications

Currency focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

9. Personal development
10. Qualifications
11. Assessment of need
12. Appropriate transition
13. Post-16 destinations

10. Qualifications

Enabling all pupils to attain a broad, ambitious and valuable portfolio of qualifications.

10.1. Qualification selection

> Some AP schools and providers educate and support pupils in Key Stages such as 1 and 3, where formal qualifications may not be expected or necessarily suitable. Similarly, short-stay providers are likely to transition pupils to other settings prior to end of year exams or the completion of their qualifications and therefore, those providers will not necessarily have extensive or indicative qualification outcomes to evaluate.

At relevant ages and stages, working towards and achieving qualifications is incredibly important for pupils in AP. Qualifications are a crucial outcome of education as they equip pupils with knowledge and skills, and they enable them to continue into further study and employment. They can also act as significant motivators and self-esteem boosters as pupils gain a sense of achievement and pride in their progression and accomplishments.

Having acknowledged in quality of education (8) that a broad and balanced curriculum permeated with rich and diverse personal development (9) opportunities is essential, pupils should be provided with the opportunity to study a breadth of appropriate and valuable qualifications. This quality area focusses on qualification attainment; however, it is important to note the necessity for the curriculum to also include personal development, skills building and other opportunities that can aid pupils' personal, social, emotional and character development – which may or not be part of a formal qualification.

Our research identified that when selecting qualifications, the following factors should be considered:

- **Pupil** - What are their prior learning levels, interests, aspirations, and expected placement length?

- **Proper** - Are the level, content, guided learning hours and assessment methods suitable?

- **Portability** - is it likely that this qualification(s) could be continued elsewhere if necessary?

- **Progression** - will this support onward progression onto a post-16 pathway and employment?

There are also operational aspects for many AP schools and providers to consider:

- **Expertise** - Do we have the staff to deliver, assess and quality assure effectively?

- **Resources** - Do we have the resources and space to provide this qualification(s)?

- **Capacity** - Can we ensure optimal class sizes and positive group dynamics?

In each case, qualification decisions should be informed by a detailed understanding of each individual pupil, which can be gained through an effective pupil induction (5). Personalisation is necessary as each pupil has different prior learning, strengths, needs and length of placement. A frequent example of this the use of unit-based qualifications such as AQA and NCFE unit awards alongside GCSE English and maths for pupils on short-term or part-time placements.[139]

10.2. Attainment

Qualification attainment in some parts of the country is particularly poor, for example, in 13 local authorities, not a single child in AP has passed their English and maths GCSE in the past three years.[140] There are also significant disparities in the academic attainment of pupils in AP when compared to mainstream. 4% of excluded children pass their English and maths GCSEs compared to 64% of pupils across all state schools.[141] It is sometimes assumed that this poorer pupil attainment is caused by AP schools providing a poorer quality education. Interestingly, this assumption does not correlate with Ofsted's judgement that 74% of AP schools and PRUs are 'Good' or 'Outstanding' compared to 73% of mainstream schools.[142] Such an assumption also omits several consequential factors:

- To what extent should pupil attainment be attributed to the AP school, based on the length of time they spent there?

- What would pupils have achieved if they had continued to be educated in mainstream school?

- To what extent have pupils' attainment been detrimentally impacted by factors beyond the control of the AP school? Noting that pupils in AP are more likely to be impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), criminal exploitation and other events such as care home relocation which can impact on attendance and engagement.

These points highlight that a narrative of AP performance and attainment centred on simple and limited comparisons with mainstream statistics can be problematic. Furthermore, placing a disproportionate emphasis on GCSE English and maths statistics when considering quality is likely to lead to curriculum narrowing in AP.

AP leaders told us…

When considering qualification attainment in AP, it must be remembered that each pupil has a unique set of circumstances and learning needs. Their education history, prior attainment, reasons for exclusion, learning needs, family background, relationships, attitude to and engagement with education and age all influence their potential. Therefore, a one size fits all approach for AP pupil qualification attainment is unsuitable.

10.3. Four principles for quality qualifications

From our research we have developed some principles that can be applied to this area to ensure quality in AP:

1. All pupils should have access to study GCSE English and maths. The aspiration for and achievement of these qualifications ensures an equity of expectation for pupils as they transition from mainstream to AP and provides them with gateway qualifications to post-16 education, employment, and training routes.

2. The achievement of the GCSE English and maths should not come at the expense of pupils being able to study other meaningful academic, vocational, technical and arts qualifications and courses. 'The curriculum should remain as broad as possible for as long as possible'.[143] AP schools and providers should endeavour to use the staffing, physical and financial resources available to them to maximise qualification breadth and ambition for their pupils.

3. The range of qualifications and learning opportunities available to pupils in AP can include:

    - Those that they would have been likely to have access to in mainstream school. For example, a number of AP schools offer GCSE's in such as Art, Design Technology and Religious Studies.

    - Those which may have been unavailable to pupils in previous schools (for example, some AP schools and providers offer qualifications in motor vehicle maintenance).

    - Those that AP school leaders deem to be the most suitable for supporting their pupils to engage, develop and progress (for example, some offer qualifications like GCSE Health and Social Care, Level 1/2 Art and Design, Level 2 construction with CSCS card and GCSE combined science).

4. Each pupil's curriculum and portfolio of qualifications should meet their needs, be coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment.[144] If this is achieved, pupils prospects of successfully transitioning to post-16 will be improved.

10.4. The curse of comparison

There are inherent issues when attempting to compare AP schools and providers' using qualification outcomes.

- **Statistical significance:** Most AP schools and providers educate statistically small cohorts of pupils. Small sample sizes mean that the data alone produced by outcome metrics do not provide reliable comparisons. Each schools' overall performance scores would be significantly impacted by individual pupil performance and movement.

- **Incomparable settings:** Effective comparison of performance across multiple institutions, within a sector, requires broadly consistent structural architecture. Consistent structural architecture means having a commonality of purpose and function, resources, inputs, and scale, in the AP sector this is not the case.

- **Different contexts:** The purposes and functions of AP schools and providers vary greatly. This can include differences in full-time and part-time provision, curriculum specialisms, average length of pupil placements, types of support services provided to pupils and mainstream schools. If two schools provide significantly different services within their local contexts, conclusions which are drawn through the comparison of their outcomes could be unreliable.

- **Unequal funding:** The funding available and expended to facilitate AP education varies greatly across settings and local authorities. State-funded AP places in PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools range from £10,000 to £40,000 per academic year.[145]

- **Pupil movement and placement lengths:** Many pupils spend just weeks or months in AP before being moved[146], whilst others spend multiple academic years in a single AP setting. In addition, some pupils are transitioned back to mainstream or other education settings and their attainment is therefore omitted from schools' outcomes data. The movement of pupils and varied lengths of time pupils spend in AP means that comparisons of their schools' qualification outcomes may not accurately capture their true performance and impact.

- **Oversimplification:** 'Due to the diversity of AP provision, placements and oversight arrangements, understanding AP performance is complex'[147]. Distilling the effectiveness of complex education establishments, working with highly vulnerable pupils into a handful of quantitative outcomes, with the omission of other important outcomes such as pupils' social and emotional development is highly problematic.

The 6 issues outlined above are also applicable to other quality areas in the currency category such as appropriate transition (12) and post-16 destinations. (13)

In general, schools are often compared based on a small number of outcomes metrics of which qualifications are often one. This can lead to misleading inferences about the quality of education. Validity is particularly important when interpreting qualification attainment data. For example, it could be valid to infer that School A tends to achieve higher grades than School B for pupils with similar prior attainment. However, it would not be valid to deem that School A is of higher quality from the attainment data alone. The AP Quality toolkit takes a broad and balanced approach to evaluating effectiveness in AP. To avoid ineffective implementation, a single quality area such as qualifications should not overemphasised or seen as an indicator of quality in isolation.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: Beachcroft AP Academy

At Beachcroft AP Academy student attainment is maximised through precise assessment and monitoring.

Beachcroft pupils are entered for English Language, English Literature, Maths and Double Science. Learners then select 3 further subjects from 'option blocks'.

Alongside summative and formative assessment, Beachcroft have created a rigorous system for monitoring pupil progress against examination specification criteria. Specification 'strands' are logged and tracked centrally using a RAG-rated system. This allows teachers to see where the knowledge and skills gaps are, enabling teachers to address them through 're-teach' opportunities each half-term.

The Academy builds pupils' exam confidence by introducing small sections of examination papers in lessons. Often pupils in AP have missed out on education and need additional support to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding under exam conditions. Teachers believe that the combination of a robust curriculum, targeted assessment and 'exam-training' reiterates the high expectations teachers hold for them and positively impacts on their belief in themselves to achieve good grades, on par with their mainstream peers.

In 2020, 90% of learners gained five or more GCSEs or equivalent.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How do you ensure that all pupils are able to study a broad range of qualifications that stretch and inspire?

- How do the qualifications offered prepare pupils for destinations that are aspirational and of interest?

- When selecting qualifications how are you considering the 4P's (Pupil, Proper, Portability and Progression)?

- How are you utilising staffing, physical, and financial resources to maximise the ambition, breadth and outcomes of qualifications you offer?

Currency focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

9. Personal development
10. Qualifications
11. Assessment of need
12. Appropriate transition
13. Post-16 destinations

11. Assessment of need

Equipping pupils, parents/carers and future education professionals with the knowledge and understanding necessary to address pupils' needs at home and in future learning environments.

11.1. Systemic sector challenges

This quality area supports appropriate transition (12) and post-16 destinations, and is closely linked to supporting pupils' needs (7) which references the work undertaken within and by the AP school to identify, understand and support pupils' needs. Assessment of Need sits within the currency category of the toolkit as it outlines the importance of pupils' needs being 'commonly known and accepted'[148] by all stakeholders. This is a vital but often overlooked outcome that paves the way for pupils' access to support and future success.

It has been identified that due to the transient nature of vulnerable pupils and the time required to undertake needs assessments, they may not receive the support they are entitled to and require.[149] Misidentification can also take place, for example, where pupils are wrongly assumed to have behavioural needs, when in fact they have underlying special needs such as SEMH, SLCN and dyslexia. Such underlying needs can result in pupils finding it difficult to self-regulate, communicate with their peers and teachers or complete the work they have been set. 'Many pupils whose needs have gone unidentified turn up in alternative provision'.[150]

AP leaders told us…

We are well placed to be able to identify any unknown needs, gain an up-to-date understanding of known needs, plan supportive strategies and work to ensure that the stakeholders of pupils' progress and safety are made aware, as appropriate.

Some mainstream schools refer pupils to AP in order to secure more specialist support for SEND needs. Some AP schools, in particular, have recruited or developed high-skilled SEND specialists who can support pupils and where necessary manage the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) application and annual review process. An EHCP is for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. It provides a blueprint for a young person's future education, and a legal document.[151] According to the Council for Disabled Children the EHCP is intended to be a living document, that reliably reflects a young person's needs and aspirations.[152] Some AP leaders shared that the process of obtaining an EHCP can be lengthy, and some suggest that it can be 'an obstacle to reintegration'[153] and the cause of delayed access to support.

Whether via the formal route of an EHCP or through an AP school's own practices and procedures, it is important that each pupil's needs are communicated to and understood by a range of stakeholders. These stakeholders initially include staff and professionals that young people engage with during the school's everyday operation and extends to pupils, their parents and education professionals they will work with in the future.

11.2. Pupils' self-awareness

An often-unconsidered aspect of needs assessment is the benefits of pupils understanding their own needs. The impact of improved self-awareness, self-regulation and pre-emptive communication about their behaviour, relationships and self-esteem can be profound.

Adolescent neuroscience and brain development research shows that teenagers in particular are developing and going through changes that will impact their emotions, mood, decisions and behaviours. Dr Frances Jensen Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School summarises 'Teens are in discovery mode. They're experiencing new things, and their brains are developing accordingly. There's simply a lot going on in their brains.'[154]

As pupils mature their ability to understand themselves, what they need and how they might respond in certain situations can aid their ability to partner with the professionals they work with both now and in the future.

The process of referral or exclusion can be disorientating for some pupils, leading them to question where they fit within the education system and society more generally.[155] AP schools and providers who support pupils to understand their own needs also help them to process their experiences, learn what works for them and can provide the necessary vocabulary to be able to communicate these things to others.

11.3. Parents and carers

If home and school have a shared understanding, agreed approach and open lines of communication, a pupil is more likely to successfully engage at school and build and maintain positive relationships at home. AP schools and providers who work with parents and carers in relation to their child's needs, share intelligence about the child, their progress and the impact of different approaches and strategies and therefore can add to their understanding, and contribute to the building of their capacity.

11.4. Other education professionals

When pupils make a transition to a new education institution the timeframe can vary depending on the circumstances. For example, year 11's progressing to post-16 is a scheduled and foreseeable event. However, if a pupil is moving to a different location with their family or to a new care home outside of the area the timeframe may be much shorter. In all instances, it is important for the AP school to support this transition by sharing information directly with the new establishment or via the local authority. The significance of having knowledge about pupils' individual needs should not be underestimated, smooth transitions and the likelihood of future success can depend heavily on the effectiveness of the information flow between organisations.

AP leaders told us...

Where transitions can be planned, for example with post-16 providers or mainstream schools, some have developed intentional information sharing protocols. These seek to ensure that the receiving institution has the key information about pupils' personal, learning, SEND and safeguarding needs as well as an opportunity to meet with teachers and other staff who know them well.

To support sustained success, some AP schools have also sought to provide ongoing support to pupils and the key workers in their new settings, however, there can be financial and staffing resource barriers for doing this consistently.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: Wave Multi-Academy Trust

Wave Multi-Academy Trust utilises their in-house expertise and specialist external services to assess pupils' needs and communicate pupil needs to future settings to set them up for success.

Prior to starting in school, each pupil and their family have a home visit from Wave's Family Support manager. This is the beginning of the needs assessment process and enables external services to immediately be contacted for additional support.

Wave make use of NHS therapists, local authority speech and language experts and Youth Offending Team staff. They liaise with Babcock, an organisation that diagnoses issues with – and promotes the development of – pupils' speech, language, social, physical, and sensory, capabilities. Babcock also provides specialist equipment to the trust and offers, a Graduated Response Tool, helping the trust to monitor their own effectiveness.

Once additional needs have been identified Wave work in partnership with external services to decide on the most appropriate interventions, strategies and approaches to take to each pupil's education.

Wave ensures that pupils' future educational settings understand their needs by providing them with a personalised profile, known as a Student Passport, and an Individual Pupil Progress Review. These documents include information about pupils' outcomes, levels of engagement and subject progress tracking, as well as informative notes about successful interventions, and things to avoid when working with them.

This information is compiled to inform the schools' judgment about a pupil's readiness to move onto another education setting, for example transitioning into mainstream education or progressing on to post-16 education. Support staff and the Family Support Team, share all of this information with pupils' next destinations and liaise with safeguarding leads to ensure that they have a full and contextualised understanding of their pupil and their needs.

Wave MAT have several AP academies who are rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and a number of their inspection reports praise the way in which they assess and meet pupil needs.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How effective are links to specialist services utilised to identify and support pupils with additional needs?

- How effectively are parents and carers integrated into the process of establishing an accurate and meaningful assessment of a child's needs?

- How do you ensure that professionals in other education settings, that pupils will transition to in future, understand your pupils' needs?

Currency focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

9. Personal development

10. Qualifications

11. Assessment of need

12. Appropriate transition

13. Post-16 destinations

12. Appropriate transition

Robust planning, communication and support that facilitates successful transitions to mainstream, other AP or specialist provision, when appropriate.

12.1. Systemic sector challenges

AP practice relating to appropriate transition sits against a backdrop of data deficiencies and ambiguous expectations. At national and local authority levels, data is not systematically, consistently or comprehensively collected on AP pupil numbers, transitions in and out of AP and the reasons for those pupil movements. For example, Education Policy Institute highlights that 'a limitation of the Alternative Provision census is that it only collects a snapshot of pupils once a year in January' as opposed to termly therefore, 'there is potential for undercounting of cases where pupils moved into alternative provision and potential overcounting of cases where their destination was unknown.'[156] There are also the following data gaps, which obscure accurate analysis of practice and performance:

- Currently, there is no data on how many times pupils are moved into mainstream school from AP, only to be sent back to AP again after a period time.[157]

- Data is not available to show the number of pupils who are moved from one AP setting to another, and the reasons for such moves are also not collected.

- 'Dual registration means that the pupil attends the second school — either part-time or full-time — to receive education that is complementary to the education they receive at their main school.'[158]. 'Due to the way that data is collected, there is no way to accurately know the total number of pupils dual registered throughout the course of an academic year.'[159]

- The government does not obligate mainstream schools to report on the reasons for dual registration, 'how long dual-registered pupils spend in AP or whether they return to a mainstream school.'[160]

- 'There is no systematic recording of the number of pupils who return to their previous mainstream school or are moved to independent AP[161] following unsuccessful placements in state-maintained AP.

- Some pupils simply drop off the radar. Research carried out by FFT Datalab shows that in England approximately 6700 pupils who should have left school in Summer 2018, did not take any qualifications and are unaccounted for.[162]

AP leaders told us...

That it is important to appreciate and consider the backgrounds of pupils in AP. Many will have experienced trauma or will have been impacted by relational loss. For example, in AP pupil cohorts there is an over-representation of pupils with social worker involvement and care experience.

As pupils prepare for, and transition out of a setting, and away from trusted relationships with peers and staff, it can have a significant impact on their wellbeing, confidence and sense of belonging. Therefore, the social and emotional impact of transitions and changes to relationship dynamics should not be overlooked.

12.2. Acknowledging limitations

Successful transitions from one education setting to another are undoubtedly reliant upon the effective actions of each setting and impacted by engagement from the individual pupil and their parents or carers.

A success of transition should consider a pupil's short-term success, as well as whether they have sustained success at their new school in the long-term.

AP leaders told us…

There are limitations to our ability to ensure pupils transition successfully. The receiving institution must play their part for it to work.

If a local school does not have an inclusive culture, with staff who are skilled at meeting the needs of our pupils then attempts at transitioning into mainstream are unlikely to be successful in the long-term.

Some colleges have specific teams who plan and prepare for the transition of vulnerable pupils into their settings, however, others do not have this resource. Therefore, a pupil's success is heavily dependent on the approach taken by their course leader or individual tutor.

a) Mainstream school

This quality area is closely aligned with partnership working (3) which includes collaboration with mainstream schools. 'Reintegration' is a commonly used term to describe when a pupil moves from AP to mainstream schooling. Professionals in a wide range of contexts aim to 'reintegrate' their pupils, and yet the number of pupils who go through this process and their rates of success are unknown[163]. 'The evidence base on the reintegration of young people from AP back into mainstream is relatively thin'.[164] The ability to improve practice around 'reintegration' and transitions is undoubtedly hampered by the lack of data through which to understand the strengths and weaknesses of what is currently happening. In addition, the word itself 'reintegration' is scrutinised by some AP professionals who argue that the focus should be on the adjustments schools make to accommodate pupils' needs, rather than a need for a 'maladapted pupil' to change to fit the system. For this reason, the toolkit uses the terminology of transitions to mainstream rather than reintegration.

One trend identified by the DfE is that pupils' likelihood of transitioning back to mainstream school is highest at primary (65%) and Key Stage 3 (64%) and then this diminishes as pupils get older. DfE research cites that only 10% of pupils who are in AP during year 11 are returned to their previous or other mainstream school.[165]

It is important to consider the views and experiences of pupils as they transition from one educational setting to another. A study which gathered pupils' perceptions and experiences of transitioning from AP to mainstream via managed moves, found that pupils identified several reasons for transitions to mainstream school failing. The two most prevalent reasons given were behavioural, such as inflexibility of school behaviour policies and teacher's approaches and belonging, which included experiencing stigma, bullying and preferring their previous school.[166]

Attitudes and approaches to transitioning pupils back into mainstream differ from among AP settings and can be dependent on the preferences of individual pupils and parents/carers, for this reason strong home and family engagement (2) is vital. Some AP settings have made transition into mainstream their primary focus and goal; while others have it as an objective for a proportion of their pupils (they deem it suitable for) and others maintain that pupils will be best supported if they remain in AP. The latter, is sometimes linked to perceptions of local schools' practice around inclusion, SEND support and behaviour management.[167]

12.3. When is it appropriate?

Our research found that transitions from AP to mainstream should be considered and sought when they are deemed to be in the best interest of the pupil. Factors which may impact consideration include:

- Where the pupil can access the most appropriate curriculum

- The pupil's desires and aspirations

- Parental buy-in and support

- The quality and inclusiveness of education in local mainstream schools

12.4. Successful transitions

Many AP schools and providers are keen to provide ongoing support to pupils and mainstream schools after the initial transition period to increase pupils' chances of success. However, staffing levels and a lack of specific funding for these activities can limit their ability to do so. Some AP leaders with such aspirations, report struggling to resource these activities.[168]

'Schools and AP providers shared common views of the processes required to facilitate a smooth reintegration for the pupil. These included good communication between the AP, the school, the pupil and the parent/carer, setting clear academic and behavioural targets for the pupil, phased (part-time) reintegration, and additional support and mentoring for (and monitoring of) the pupil.'[169]

Irrespective of the transition plan and support provided, 'the most commonly cited sources of evidence for successful reintegration were: the pupil has remained in mainstream schooling for at least two terms; improvements in pupil behaviour, most often shown through behavioural data collected by the schools; and, academic progress'.[170]

12.5. Barriers to transitions

Our research identified this non-exhaustive list of potential barriers to the successful transition of pupils from AP to mainstream:

- In some locations, there may not be a suitable mainstream school for pupils to move to. This issue is particularly pertinent for excluded pupils in rural areas where there are 'fewer local mainstream schools.'[171]

- A lack of effective support systems and staff capacity within the receiving school, both in terms of the availability and capability of staff to support transitions.[172]

- School performance tables can negatively impact on mainstream schools' willingness to take on pupils, particularly Key Stage 4 pupils.[173]

- Some AP leaders report 'some mainstream schools being reluctant to take pupils from AP (typically because of concerns about their behaviour, feeling that they would not be able to meet the child's needs, and/or concerns about their likely academic performance).'[174]

- Poor communication between the two institutions can impact the success of a transition[175].

- There are some indications that transitions can be stymied when EHCP applications have been submitted and are awaiting potential approval, which can be a lengthy period of time[176].

- One often overlooked factor is that pupil success in AP and parent/carer satisfaction with the education their child is currently receiving can reduce the desire for a return to mainstream schooling.

b) Other Alternative Provision

There are times when pupils transition from one AP setting to another. There are a range of forces that can come into play to cause this, for example:

- A commissioner (local authority or mainstream school) may choose to move a pupil due to concerns about a pupil's progress or safety, due to another setting being deemed to be more appropriate, a need to cut costs, or concerns over the quality of the current provision. Parental/carer pressure can also influence this type of decision.

- A state-maintained AP such as an academy may decide to move a pupil on due to their curriculum, SEND, safeguarding or behavioural needs. This may take place through a dual-registration referral, a managed move, or a formal exclusion.

c) Specialist provision

Nationally, it appears that there is significant interplay and growing overlap between the roles of AP and special school systems. The way in which this manifests itself often differs by region.

When pupils are placed in AP due to a lack of capacity in special schools, they are sometimes then required to move again if and when a place becomes available. In other cases, a new diagnosis of special needs or the creation of an EHCP results in a need for the pupil to make a transition. Sometimes, such pupils are required to remain in AP. An ISOS partnership survey of 118 local authorities found that 52% said that they used AP due to a lack of specialist provision particularly for pupils with SEMH[177].

These instances of pupil transition to special school settings can take place mid-year or more naturally when pupils reach the end of their placements provision. For example, a Key Stage 2 AP school or provider will have a structured process for transition pupils into appropriate places once they reached the end of Key Stage 2. Their transition routes are likely to include special schools, other AP schools and providers and mainstream schools, and decisions will be made on a pupil-by-pupil basis.

Supporting an effective transition is a key responsibility for all AP leaders. AP schools and providers play an important role in the educational careers of the pupils they work with. The success and sustainability of pupils in their new setting are reliant on the preparation they receive and the effective transfer of information and communication between all relevant stakeholders. The ingredients of and barriers to successful transitions into other alternative provision or specialist provision are consistent with those outlined in a).

AP leaders told us…

The needs profiles of pupil referrals they receive is greatly impacted by the quality and availability of places within local special schools.

One leader described agreeing with the local authority to take a pupil with significant SEND needs on the proviso that they would receive the required additional funding into order to meet the needs which were beyond the scope of their usual provision.

Two other leaders shared that they had developed expertise in-house that enables them to efficiently develop an understanding of pupils' needs, make EHCP applications when necessary and then ensure effective and timely transitions into special provision when appropriate.

Currency – 12. Appropriate transition

Example of practice: Bradford AP Academy

Bradford AP Academy employs a team of three inclusion leaders who support students to transition into their next educational setting.

From the time they join the Academy, all staff work to support and prepare students for the transition out of the AP school and onto the next phase – be that another AP school, special school or mainstream setting.

Staff gauge pupils' readiness for transition against their attitudes and behaviours, academic progress and attendance. In the case of transition back to mainstream, the Academy will apply to the local authority's Fair Access Panel and submit supporting evidence. A school will be allocated, in line with parental choice, and the Academy will work with the new school, pupil and parents to plan and prepare for the transition. Keyworkers play a critical role at this juncture. In the first instance they act as the main point of contact between the new school and the

Academy, building positive relationships with mainstream colleagues and laying the groundwork for future success. The keyworker will have a thorough understanding of not only of the pupil they are supporting but also the new school's environment and expectations.

As a result of the trusting relationships forged by inclusion leaders with the pupil, the family and the new setting, they are able to effectively challenge and support when difficulties arise during transitions. The school trusts the inclusion leaders to promote inclusive practice, help to find solutions and support the pupil, whilst parents know they will advocate for their child as well as hold them to account.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How are pupils and their parents/carers prepared for upcoming transitions and changes to education arrangements?

- How do you manage all transitions to maximise the likelihood of success for your pupils?

- When appropriate, how do you facilitate the transition of pupils to mainstream schools, and do you provide after-care?

Currency focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

9. Personal development

10. Qualifications

11. Assessment of need

12. Appropriate transition

13. Post-16 destinations

13. Post-16 destinations

The preparation of pupils for their next steps after year 11 including Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEAIG), employability skills and transition support.

Some AP schools and providers do not educate and support year 11 pupils, therefore, this quality area would not directly apply in the same way in those contexts. Where this is case, the Appropriate transition (12) quality area would have even greater importance. Nevertheless, preparing pupils for their post-16 destinations should not solely take place in year 11. During earlier school years raising aspiration and career awareness activities should be used to increase pupils' understanding of their options, help to consolidate their ambitions and enable them to proactively engage in their education and future progression.

13.1. Systemic sector challenges

National data shows that permanent exclusions peak in year 10 and dual registrations peak in year 11.[178] This means that a large proportion of the AP pupil cohort are concentrated in Key Stage 4. This combined with relatively low numbers of pupils transitioning back into mainstream means that many pupils remain in AP until the end of year 11. In addition, 'Very few AP schools have sixth forms. This means that almost all pupils registered at AP schools at the end of Year 11 have to transfer to other schools or colleges to continue in education'.[179] The most common post-16 routes pursued by AP pupils are courses at FE colleges or work-based training, with a minority of pupils going into sixth forms to do A-levels or into full-time employment.[180]

Pupils who transition from AP to post-16 do considerably worse than their mainstream peers[181] and are over-represented amongst young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). 'Pupils in 2014 who ended Key Stage 4 (KS4) in alternative provision make up 1% of all KS4 pupils but 4% of all NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) 16 year olds'.[182] '59% of young people who attend Alternative Provision go on to a sustained post-16 destination, compared to 94% attending mainstream schools, and 23% of the cohort are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)'.[183] 'One AP reported that 96% of their former pupils were attending college or in employment in the September after they left, but this had reduced to 75% by January the next year.'[184]

The contextual challenges outlined above necessitate a focus from AP schools and providers to support pupils to prepare for, secure and sustain their post-16 destinations.

13.2. Dedicated funding

In 2018, the DfE described post-16 transition support as 'patchy across England, with only some local authorities specifically funding AP schools to do NEET prevention work'[185] In 2020, The Centre for Social Justice research found that half of AP schools do not have any staff dedicated to post-16 transition support and of those that do, three in four are employed in this role part-time.[186] Yet government research has found this to be a crucial area to focus on.[187] Prior to the pandemic, systems for support transition from AP to post-16 were not comprehensive established due to a lack of dedicated funding for schools to continue to pupils once they had left at 16.[188] Historically, most AP schools tracked post-16 destinations and outcomes for their pupils in some way. 'This was especially true for large, full-time APs with high proportions of pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4'.[189] However, for some there were challenges with finding the time and resource to comprehensively track and analyse this information.[190] Most were reliant upon informal and inconsistent 'personal contact with ex-pupils,

to stay updated on their activities once they had left'[191] and some 'reported that despite voluntarily offering extended support to pupils who leave their settings, many such pupils still struggle to participate in education, training and employment compared to their peers'.[192]

This is an area where DfE policy in recent years has positively addressed the challenges outlined above. As part of the government's response to Covid-19, in 2020 and 2021, The Department for Education announced £7 million and £8 million funding programmes respectively. The AP Transition Fund was established to support year 11 pupils to transition into education, employment or training.[193]

The DfE has encouraged AP leaders to use this funding to develop or bolster their post-16 transition support package, which could include strengthening multi-agency work, recruiting transition mentors, giving existing staff additional responsibilities or providing personalised support to pupils with SEND.[194]

> **AP leaders told us…**
>
> This funding enabled them to 'turbo charge' the plans they already had for post-16 transition and ongoing alumni support.

From this funding and the initiatives that were supported four best practice case studies have been developed. They have been created to help 'AP settings to support their year 11 students as they transition into post-16 destinations and avoid becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET)'.[195] These case studies include:

- Multi-agency working to support students

- Transition mentor supports a young person to continue education

- Existing staff member expands their role to provide transition support for year 11's

- Supporting a student through a bespoke offer

13.3. The Post-16 sector

Despite the recent funding and the best efforts of those accessing it, there remain some systemic post-16 sector challenges that can impact pupils' success and sustainability in post-16 over the long-term. FFT Education Datalab summarised this matter as a two-fold issue:

'Firstly, increasing the proportion of former AP pupils in education post-16 has to solve two problems. Firstly, the initial transition problem. That is to say that there are

suitable post-16 pathways available for young people with low attainment at Key Stage 4 and that all pupils enrol on courses. Secondly the drop out problem. This means supporting pupils on those courses and providing information on alternative options if necessary…

Secondly, given the way the Post-16 sector is currently organised, this has to entail working with colleges and work-based learning providers.'[196]

13.4. Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEAIG)

One of the foundational building blocks of post-16 progression and future success is high-quality Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEAIG). The post-16 places must be suitable and aligned with pupils' career aspirations for the future. Moreover, careers support should be a consistent thread featured throughout AP practice, as it has the power to make learning real and education relevant for young people. As such, attendance and engagement (6), quality of education (8), personal development (9), and appropriate transitions (12), all feature references to CEAIG. High-quality targeted careers guidance can help pupils and their parents/carers to make informed choices about their next steps and increase the likelihood of finding post-16 options that are suitable, engaging and beneficial to their future employment prospects.

An important aspect of CEAIG is employer interactions and work experience, which can contribute to the raising of aspirations and give pupils an experience of 'the real world'. AP school leaders 'who felt they had a good track record of offering successful work experience described an approach that aligned work placements with the pupil's career plan and/or the vocational subjects they were undertaking'.[197] Previously conducted research cites that 'it is important to forge links between AP and local colleges and employers in order to assist pupils make the post-16 transition to less rigidly structured environments'.[198] In addition, some AP leaders have shared that positive work experience placements can be particularly beneficial to students who have lost self-confidence following their previous school experiences.[199]

13.5. Qualifications

Another important foundational building block are the qualifications (10) pupils achieve. AP pupils who achieve level 2 in both literacy and numeracy by the end of Key Stage 4 have higher rates of participation than their AP peers who did not. Furthermore, post-16 participation among those

without level 1 qualifications in literacy and numeracy are especially low, particularly at age 17.[200] This underscores that fact that practice and performance across each of the 13 quality areas are interdependent and interconnected.

AP leaders told us...

That pupils often leave with a suite of qualifications that enable them to move on to their next destination. Some pupils were unlikely to have achieved very much if they have continued in mainstream school because it just wasn't working. With us they get another chance, and we can create a curriculum that suits their needs and aspirations.

Also, at times pupils who have been able to study vocational qualifications such as motor vehicle maintenance in AP setting are at a technical advantage when they move on to college as they already understand how to use the equipment and how to undertake key tasks such as vehicle fault diagnostics to a high standard.

13.6. Transition support

In order to gain post-16 places and transition smoothly, pupils require support with 'making decisions about competing pathways and qualifications; acquiring the necessary accreditation; submitting applications; preparing for interviews; and learning the social skills and knowledge that would be necessary to be successful'.[201] UK research is littered with evidence that good post-16 transition and

retention support involves the continuation of relationships with and support from AP professionals once pupils begin their new post-16 journey. These research findings are built on the understanding that 'relationships with trusted support workers that continue beyond the placement in AP can help young people to make positive transitions post-16 where their engagement can be fragile'.[202]

AP leaders told us…

The continuation of relationships between key AP staff and the pupil is crucial for all transitions. Pupils with histories of abuse and neglect are particularly vulnerable to the impact of relationship endings, changes and the forming of new ones. These transitions can have significant impact upon their social and emotional needs and mental health and wellbeing.

Here is an 'example of practice', they are not intended to be used as blueprints or to be seen as perfect case studies. Instead, they have been included to give a flavour of existing practice and are a continuation of the collaborative approach we have taken with AP leaders throughout this project.

Example of practice: Haybrook College

Haybrook College employs a dedicated Moving on Coordinator (MoC) to manage and support the transition to post-16 provision and develop the school's Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEAIG) offer.

The Moving on Coordinator has a wide portfolio of responsibilities including:

- Holding regular timetabled sessions with pupils in years 9, 11 and post-16 focussed on raising career aspirations, preparing for adulthood, interview techniques, CV writing and travel training where required.

- Supporting young people to explore a range of post-16 opportunities including apprenticeships and traineeships and assisting with applications.

- Organising independent careers advice through independent and impartial advisers and career insight days with local and national employers.

In 2020, 81% of year 11 and post 16 students felt that they were now better equipped to make informed choices about their future.

After year 11, Haybrook closely monitors and provides intensive support attendance and engagement support for at least 7 months. This means that staff can act quickly to support students who are at risk of disengaging or who have dropped out of their placements – either to support re-engagement or to signpost to additional support services.

During Covid-19, Haybrook utilised the government's emergency transition funding to create a 10-week summer course for students at risk of becoming NEET in partnership with a local social enterprise. They were also able to make AP staff available at two FE campuses to support students with emerging issues.

Over the last three years, on average, 80% of pupils have maintained their placements in education, employment, or training after leaving Haybrook. Haybrook has the Investors in Careers quality mark and continue to strive to increase pupils' retention rates in post-16.

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about this aspect of AP quality. These questions can be used by leaders and other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Evaluative questions

- How are you preparing pupils for the next stage of their learning and future careers?

- How do you draw on external resources, such as the local community, to provide work-based and other learning opportunities for your pupils?

- What is your approach to ensuring that all pupils secure and sustain an appropriate post-16 education, employment, or training pathway?

Community

1. Department for Education, 2017. Alternative Provision: Effective Practice and Post 16 Transition. Sue Tate Consulting Ltd. P8

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Taking this forward

We are keen for the AP Quality Toolkit to be implemented in all AP contexts. You can make a start by following these three steps:

Step 1 – Let us know

Click here to let us know that you are using the toolkit. This will help us to monitor how widely the toolkit is being implemented and enable us to update you when new resources become available.

Step 2 – Begin

a. Decide how you will use the toolkit. This could be to:

  1. Enable AP leaders to carry out robust self-evaluation and improvement planning.
  2. Quality assure and improve AP schools and providers.
  3. Ensure quality and suitability during commissioning.
  4. Examine practice across a locality or group of AP schools and providers.
  5. Assess the preparedness of prospective AP schools and providers prior to opening.
  6. Support peer review between AP schools and providers.
  7. Evaluate and improve mainstream schools' in-school AP.

b. Share this report and your plans with colleagues, partners and relevant stakeholders

c. Make use of the free toolkit resources available here including the evaluative questions and the evaluative template

Step 3 – Stay in touch

We are working on prototypes for an online evaluation tool and AP quality dashboard. So, watch this space! We would also like to hear from you. Please share with us your feedback, and experience of using the toolkit in your context.

1. Contact the author:
    dennis.simms@centreforsocialjustice.org.uk

2. Access our **online knowledge hub** and join our **'Get Connected'** community

3. Follow us on Twitter: **@IntegratED_ed**

Appendices

Appendix 1

Investigating and examining various approaches

Before identifying the AP Quality Toolkit as the most viable and effective approach to evaluating quality and facilitating improvement, we investigated and examined the advantages and disadvantages of four other potential approaches:

1. Performance measures

2. League tables

3. Comparative clusters

4. A bespoke data tool

Each of these approaches, along with their potential benefits and drawbacks are outlined below.

1. Performance measures

The Idea

The academic performance of secondary schools is monitored through a collection of performance measures. These include Progress 8, Attainment 8 English Baccalaureate (EBacc) entries, EBacc average point score, Grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE and staying in education or employment Post-16. School performance across these measures is compared and the government make this data publicly available.

Our starting point was to explore the development of a collection of performance measures for AP schools. This was centred around year 11 leavers and included scores for progress (such as the Progress 5 and Progress 6 measures used in some settings[1]), attendance, English and Maths attainment and Post-16 destinations.

The Benefits

The potential benefits would have been for schools and their stakeholders to be able to:

- Identify how well they are performing against key performance indicators

- Identify areas where they are performing less well, that require improvement.

- Reviewing this data year-on-year would facilitate the monitoring of a school's performance over time. It would also be easy to implement, by following the models of data collection, analysis and publication already used for mainstream schools.

Appendix 1

The Drawbacks

We concluded that this traditional approach would be ineffective for several reasons:

- **Missing schools:** There are AP schools who educate pupils in Key Stages 1-3, these pupils then transition to other schools, at various points, for the conclusion of their school-aged studies. The quality and performance of such schools would not be addressed through these year 11 focussed measures.

- **Missing pupils:** Many pupils spend significant periods of the time in AP, but do not necessarily complete year 11 in AP. For example, student A could be excluded in year 9 and could spend 18-months in AP before being supported to re-joining a mainstream school for year 11. The quality of the education pupils in these circumstances receive would not be accounted for by these measures.

- **Disincentivising:** Such performance measures could disincentivise actions that are in the best interest of a pupil or incentivise actions that are not in the best interest of pupils. For example, attainment scores would be negatively impacted by the reintegration of a relatively high performing pupil into a mainstream school. In addition, AP Schools with referrals processes could be disincentivised from accepting pupils with specific academic or needs profiles because of the likely impact those pupils will have on the school's performance scores. A consequential impact of this could be that local authorities (LAs) struggle to place pupils with less good academic profiles into some AP schools and instead have to commission places in poorer performing AP schools or unregulated settings that are less selective.

- **Statistical significance:** Most AP settings educate statistically small cohorts of pupils. This means that data produced by such measures would not provide reliable comparisons. Each schools' overall performance scores would be significantly impacted by individual pupil performance and movement.

- **Oversimplification:** This approach is predicated on distilling the effectiveness of complex education establishments, working with highly vulnerable pupils into a handful of metrics, with the omission of other important outcomes such as pupils' social and emotional development. Social and emotional development data would be omitted from any potential performance measures concept because the DfE does not collect any such data which could be meaningfully compared across schools.

Given that AP schools are often the provider of last resort, the benchmarks must never provide a disincentive to accept a child onto their roll. They must be designed with the purpose of enabling AP schools to improve, raise standards, and learn from one another, but must under no circumstances create a high-stakes accountability system for AP.[2]

2. League tables

The Idea

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes mainstream school performance data via www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk which can be filtered and sorted based on a range of metrics. This data is also used by organisation such as the BBC, The Times and The Telegraph to create a variety of school league tables. It would be possible to take the same approach using AP performance measures (as outlined above).

The Benefits

Schools and their stakeholders could compare performance from one AP school to another. Notwithstanding the criticism of school league tables, schools who are performing poorly relative to others in their sector, or locality could be motivated to improve outcomes.[3]

The Drawbacks

There are number issues that would impact the reliability and effectiveness of AP league tables:

- **Incomparable settings:** Effective comparison of performance across multiple institutions, within a sector, requires broadly consistent structural architecture. Consistent structural architecture means having a commonality of purpose and function, resources, inputs, and scale, in the AP sector this is not the case.

- **Different purposes:** The purposes and functions of AP schools vary greatly. This can include differences in full-time and part-time provision, curriculum specialisms, their approaches to reintegration, types of support services provided to pupils and mainstream schools. If two schools provide significantly different services

within their local contexts conclusions which are drawn through the comparison of their outcomes could be unreliable.

- **Unequal funding:** The funding available and expended to facilitate AP education varies greatly across settings and local authorities. State-funded AP (PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools) range from £10,000 to £40,000 per academic year.[4]

- **Placement lengths:** Many pupils spend weeks or months in AP before being moved[5], whilst others spend multiple academic years in a single AP setting. The average length of time that pupils stay in AP is difficult to calculate or estimate, as the necessary pupil movement data is not currently captured nationally.

- **Pupil mobility:** Dynamic pupil needs and changes in demand from mainstream schools requires AP schools to continually adapt. They also impact the types of outcomes that are achieved by pupils. Therefore, the reliability of comparing schools based on pupil-level characteristics that vary to this extent is questionable. In our research, AP leaders shared inherent challenges with comparing even their own school's academic performance data year-to-year due to pupil characteristics often changing so significantly.

- **Missing the point:** There is also a risk that AP league tables could shift the focus of actions to 'achieving improvements in performance tables in ways that require no improvement in the underlying quality of education'.[6] Furthermore, during our research we found that there is not an appetite among AP school leaders for such league tables.

3. Comparative clusters

The Idea

Having acknowledged the issues presented by comparing schools with diverse contexts via league tables, we explored comparative clusters which is an adaptation of the 'Most Similar Groups' (MSGs) approach taken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

"MSGs are groups of police force areas that have been found to be the most similar to each other based on an analysis of demographic, social and economic characteristics which relate to crime.

"They are designed to help make a fairer comparison between police forces than the England and Wales average can sometimes offer. Although caution should still be used in making black and white comparisons between forces, even in the same MSG."[7]

We explored using a similar approach to create clusters of AP schools who have similar contexts. Contextual factors included the various learning needs and academic profiles of their pupils, their cohort sizes and number of sites.

The Benefits

The feedback we received from AP leaders was that being grouped in a cluster of other AP schools who operate in broadly similar contexts for the purposes of comparison and collaboration would be beneficial. This would provide more relevant comparisons of AP school performance, when compared to league tables categorised by school type. Having these clusters could greatly improve collaboration and partnership working across the sector. AP school leaders could draw on support and expertise from their cluster and benefit from shared learning.

The Drawbacks

The main disadvantages with this concept were:

- **Implementation:** Each AP school has a unique combination of contextual factors, therefore, identifying the 'most similar' schools would be a complex and subjective exercise. It would also likely result in some clusters being relatively large and others being too small to provide useful comparison and collaboration opportunities.

- **Capped expectations:** There is also a risk that this could shift focus too heavily on the contextual factors impacting students and their schools and less on overall performance. For example, these groupings could result in an expectations cap, whereby AP schools performing at the top of their group may not be supported to improve further. Similarly, if a particular cluster only included relatively low performing schools, the potential benefits of comparison and collaboration could be greatly diminished.

- **Cluster changes:** It is likely that clusters would likely need to be reset on an annual basis to reflect changes in the need's profiles of pupil cohorts (as previously outlined in dynamic cohorts). One of the most attractive advantages of the MSG's are the collaborative relationships that are established between police forces over time. If clusters were to be reset frequently the opportunity for such relationships to be established would be reduced. In addition, the ability to track and monitor improvements over time relative to a consistent comparative cluster of schools would not be possible. Not changing the clusters could result in schools being inappropriately clustered, skewed comparative data and an inability to reap the intended rewards of this approach.

Appendix 1

- **Superficial improvement:** Improving the way in which outcomes are achieved is as important as the outcomes themselves. This approach would seek to compare schools based on their performance across a selection of metrics. The comparison of outcomes alone, may not facilitate the desired improvements in the underlying quality of education in AP. For example, if English and Maths grades are improved at school A, this would be reflected positively in their cluster ranking. However, if this improvement was achieved through a narrowing of the curriculum then that would not be advantageous for pupils at the school.

4. A bespoke data tool

The Idea

This concept focussed on developing a national AP data collection and analysis system. This would be akin to the FFT Datalab Schools Like Yours[8] website and would enable users to interrogate the data using a range of pupil- and school-level contextual filters. These filters could include the Key Stages a school educates, their Planned Admission Number (PAN) and percentages of pupils eligible for FSM, with SEND and EHCPs.

The Benefits

This would enable school leaders and other stakeholders such as commissioner and LAs to view and analyse each school's performance. They would be able to identify a school's performance and compare them with schools with similar contextual factors as well as with regional and national averages.

If paired with improved data collection via the AP census, this approach could improve the breadth, rigor, and useability of nationally available AP data.

The Drawbacks

The main drawbacks are as follows:

- **Misleading data:** Data can be interpreted and manipulated by users and placing too much focus on data can be problematic. As outlined in the 'AP performance measures' section the statistical reliability of comparative data for settings with small cohorts of pupils is questionable. For example, a setting with 10 year 11 pupils could see a 10% impact of their attainment statistics if a single pupil did not pass a particular qualification. Therefore, any statistics or findings drawn from such data would fraught with issues.

- **Data isn't enough:** There is not a strong evidence base to support the notion that increasing the availability of data alone would lead to significantly improved outcomes for pupils in AP.[9] Ofsted's 2019 School inspection update recognises that 'data should not be 'king''.[10]

- **Unnecessary workload:** Ofsted also explain that schools should not be 'repeatedly and excessively measuring and recording pupil progress and attainment in ways that are not always valid, reliable or useful to teachers and pupils. They state the importance of shifting focus onto; 'what matters educationally', 'the real substance of education', the overall 'quality of education' and avoiding additional data related 'workload for leaders and staff'.[11]These two points are also of relevance to each of the previous outlined approaches that place disproportionate emphasis on data and a restricted number of outcomes metrics.

We found each of these to have fundamental flaws, which would not only fail to deliver the desired improvement across the sector, but would likely do more damage and further disadvantage pupils in AP. The risks of harm included:

- Changes to practice driven by the desire to improve arbitrary performance metrics that undermine the underlying quality of education

- Increased selectivity by AP academies who have a referral/admissions process

- Increases in the number of vulnerable pupils who are moved into unregulated settings

Appendix 2

AP Quality Toolkit: Evaluative questions

These evaluative questions help to structure reflections and conversations about each quality area. They have been developed and refined through our pilots and can be used by leaders and any other stakeholders during self-evaluation, quality assurance, commissioning and peer review.

Answers which emerge from these questions help to provide insights on current strengths and possible areas for development.

1. Workforce development and staff wellbeing

- Is there a well-planned CPD programme that meets the differentiated needs of staff?
- How do CPD activities enable staff to be more effective in the contexts in which they work?
- Are staff suitably qualified and skilled to perform their roles?
- What evidence is there that staff are well supported and cared for?
- Is feedback on staff wellbeing gathered and are the results reviewed and acted upon by leaders and governors/trustees?

2. Home and family engagement

- How are pupils and their families supported to embed what is learned at school within the home environment?
- Is there a co-ordinated approach to communication and engagement with parents and carers?
  - Does this consider frequency of contact, sharing positives and issues and other key information in a timely manner?
- Are parents and carers invited to provide feedback on the way in which they are engaged with and supported? What do the findings indicate?

3. Partnership working

- How do relationships with agencies, charities and other organisations enhance the effectiveness of support for pupils?
- Are strong relationships being built and maintained with local schools to support pupils, enrich the curriculum and/or develop staff?
- If external education or training providers are used, how are they managed to ensure safety, quality, and value for money?

4. Research and innovation

- Is existing research being utilised to improve knowledge and practice?
- Are there examples of innovations being developed and shared by staff to improve practice?
- Is there evidence of the positive impact of research and innovation being shared with other schools or settings?
- Are staff leading or contributing to research projects?

5. Pupil induction

- Is there a detailed understanding of pupils' prior learning, academic needs, and risk factors before they attend lessons?
- Are all key stakeholders (pupil, family, previous school, relevant agencies) engaged with during the induction process?
- How, when and to who is information about new pupils shared?
- What evidence is there to indicate that the pupil induction process is fit for purpose?

6. Attendance and engagement

- What systems are used to ensure regular attendance?
- Are there demonstrable improvements in pupils' attendance? If not, what are the reasons for this?
- Specifically, how do/will pupils be supported with persistent absenteeism?
- How are levels of pupil engagement and motivation increased?

7. Supporting pupils' needs

- Literacy: How are pupils supported to improve their literacy skills?
- SEND: What is the process for assessing and understanding pupils' SEND needs?
- SEND: How does the attendance, personal development, and attainment of pupils with SEND compare to their non-SEND peers?
- Health and wellbeing: How do you support pupils to improve their health and wellbeing?

8. Quality of education

- How does the education you provide set pupils up for success in the future?
- How do you tailor the curriculum to support the specific learning needs of individual pupils?
- How do you incorporate diverse viewpoints and perspectives when developing pupils' cultural capital?
- How well prepared are pupils for their next stage of learning, education or training?

9. Personal development

- How does your curriculum enable pupils to better lead themselves and others?
- To what extent, do you provide a range of opportunities that are suited to the needs of your pupils?
- To what extent are pupils eager to learn new things and develop personally?
- How do you promote tolerance and acceptance within your school community?

10. Qualifications

- How do you ensure that all pupils are able to study a broad range of qualifications that stretch and inspire?
- How do the qualifications offered prepare pupils for destinations that are aspirational and of interest?
- When selecting qualifications how are you considering the 4P's (Pupil, Proper, Portability and Progression)?
- How are you utilising staffing, physical, and financial resources to maximise the ambition, breadth and outcomes of qualifications you offer?

11. Assessment of Need

- How effective are links to specialist services utilised to identify and support pupils with additional needs?
- How effectively are parents and carers integrated into the process of establishing an accurate and meaningful assessment of their child's needs?
- How do you ensure that professionals in education settings that your pupils transition to understand your pupils' needs?

12. Appropriate Transition

- How are pupils and their parents/carers prepared for upcoming transitions and changes to education arrangements?
- How do you manage all transitions to maximise the likelihood of success for your pupils?
- When appropriate, how do you facilitate the transition of pupils to mainstream schools or special schools, and do you provide after-care?

13. Post-16 destinations

- How are you preparing pupils for the next stage of their learning and future careers?
- How do you draw on external resources, such as the local community, to provide work-based and other learning opportunities for your pupils?
- What is your approach to ensuring that all pupils secure and sustain an appropriate Post-16 education, employment, or training pathway?

Appendix 3

AP Quality Toolkit: Evaluative template

Community: Recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

Benchmark	Strengths	Development areas	Sources of evidence	Actions
1. Workforce development and wellbeing. Recruiting, retaining and developing high quality staff within a supportive school culture.				
2. Home and family engagement. Establishing strong relationships with parents and carers that support them and lead to improvements in pupil attendance and engagement, behaviour, learning and attainment.				
3. Partnership working. Safeguarding and meeting pupil needs through strategic partnership working with local authorities, mainstream schools, external AP providers and other agencies.				
4. Research and innovation. A commitment to continual development, innovation and the application of evidence-based practice, such as trauma-informed approaches for pupils who have Adverse Childhood Experiences.				

Appendix 3

Curriculum: Accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, the quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Benchmark	Strengths	Development areas	Sources of evidence	Actions
5. Pupil induction. A robust induction process that increases understanding of pupils' backgrounds and needs, supports decision-making and facilitates the development of positive relationships.				
6. Attendance and engagement. The culture and systems of attendance and engagement that ensure high aspirations for pupils, timely interventions and sustained improvement over time.				
7. Supporting pupils' needs. Building relationships and understanding and adeptly supporting pupil needs including their literacy, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, physical and mental health and wellbeing.				
8. Quality of education. A well-planned, broad, ambitious and tailored curriculum that enables pupils to learn, progress and develop in preparation for their next stage of education, employment or training.				

Appendix 3

Currency: Focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

Benchmark	Strengths	Development areas	Sources of evidence	Actions
9. Personal development. The provision of opportunities and support to develop the behaviours, skills and character necessary for pupils' current and future success, including resilience, confidence, self-management and teamwork.				
10. Qualifications. Enabling all pupils to attain a broad, ambitious and valuable portfolio of qualifications.				
11. Assessment of need. Equipping pupils, parents/carers and future education professionals with the knowledge and understanding necessary to address pupils' needs at home and in future learning environments.				
12. Appropriate transition. Robust planning, communication and support that facilitates successful transitions to mainstream, other AP or specialist provision, when appropriate.				
13. Post-16 destinations. The preparation of pupils for their next steps after year 11 including Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIAG), employability skills and transition support.				

Appendix 4

Examples of Practice directory

School/Organisation
Aspire AP
The Pears Family School
Chessbrook Education Support Centre
The Pendlebury Centre PRU
London East Alternative Provision
The Rowans AP Academy
Educational Diversity
Northamptonshire Hospital and Outreach Education AP Academy
Westside School
Harmonize Academy
Ormiston Beachcroft Academy
Wave Multi-Academy Trust
Bradford AP Academy
Haybrook College

1. Department for Education. 2018. Alternative provision market analysis. ISOS Partnership. P104

2. Centre for Social Justice. 2020. Warming the cold spots of alternative provision: A manifesto for system improvement. P71

3. IPPR, 2003. Time to Say Goodbye? The Future of School Performance Tables

4. Department for Education, 2018. Alternative provision market analysis. ISOS Partnership. P45

5. Centre for Social Justice. 2020. Warming the cold spots of alternative provision: A manifesto for system improvement. P77

6. Ofsted, 2019. School inspection update.

7. HMICFRS, 2019. Police Forces Data.

8. FFT Datalab, 2020. Schools Like Yours.

9. Ofsted, 2019. School inspection update.

10. Ofsted, 2019. School inspection update.

11. Ofsted, 2019. School inspection update.

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