

Report Extract

Alternative provision

In June 2011, Ofsted published *Alternative Provision*. The report evaluates the use of off-site alternative provision by a small sample of schools and pupil referral units. Schools and pupil referral units can use a range of alternative provision to try to prevent students from being excluded, or to re-engage students in their education. The survey considers what makes alternative provision successful and examines some of the current issues associated with its use.

The elements of successful alternative provision

The survey evidence showed that there was no perfect package of alternative provision; different arrangements and different types and amounts of provision were successful for different settings and students. However, there were some common elements of practice in the successful provision. These related to the place of the provision in a student's curriculum; arranging the provision; quality assuring it; and the outcomes which could be gained. The section below extrapolates the elements of best practice that were seen during the survey.

The right place in a student's curriculum

At its best, alternative provision is timely, well-planned and not a 'last resort' or a bolt on.

- Students remain a full part of the school at all times and at no time are 'out of sight, out of mind'.
- The provision is a planned part of a personalised pathway, ideally from the start of Year 10.
- It has clearly defined intentions which relate to personal and academic outcomes.
- The provision complements, not replicating or replacing, the school's own curriculum.
- Attending the alternative provision placement does not involve 'missing' lessons but is part of a timetable constructed around the group or individuals.

- If lessons are missed,, arrangements are made for good-quality additional tuition and there is no reliance on students to 'catch up' without being taught.
- The school or unit provides pastoral support to ensure that students are not isolated when at placements and can seek advice back at school when needed.
- If the provision is accredited, the school or college is clear about the purpose of the accreditation. The accreditation is not tokenistic; it is valued by the school, recognised by future employers or colleges, and complements rather than replicates the accreditation being gained in school.
- If the provision is not accredited, the school enables students to gain sufficient qualifications during their time in school.

Successful finding, commissioning and selecting

The care which schools and pupil referral units put into sourcing, selecting and commissioning alternative provision, and the support mechanisms available to them to do so, are key elements of the process. The best practice contains the following elements.

- The local authority or partnerships of schools have identified a selection of provision to meet a range of needs.
- Providers have to meet a set of clearly defined minimum standards. These include safeguarding, health and safety, quality of accommodation, value for money, hours offered and procedures for communication with the school or unit.
- Even where there are coordinated processes for sourcing and commissioning the provision, the school or unit visits the provider in advance of a placement and assesses the suitability for the student to see if it will meet their individual needs.
- The provision is selected taking into account the balance of the student's curriculum, their personal and social needs, the accreditation offered, and the opportunities for progression.
- The quality of what is provided is never less than could be provided or would be accepted at school – including accommodation, communication, tracking of progress and safeguarding.
- The student is involved in the process and visits the provider in advance.
- Learning and progress – academic, vocational and/or personal – are the clear focus of the placement.
- The school or unit gives the provider clear, jargon free, relevant information about the student's needs from the outset. This includes information about

special educational needs, especially literacy skills, the student's strengths, and their behaviour.

- The provider tells the school or unit if they need to know anything else and do not try to replicate the information through testing or assessment.
- The provider tells the school or unit what the student is aiming for and can reasonably be expected to learn through the placement.

Rigorous quality assurance

Where alternative provision is successful, the school or unit keeps firm 'ownership' of students who attend it and ensures that the placement meets the student's needs at all times. Rigorous quality assurance is a crucial part of this.

- The student knows that the school or unit is interested in their provision and will intervene and support them if there are any problems.
- The school or unit has a key link member of staff who liaises with the placement provider and takes an ongoing interest in the student's progress.
- Staff from the school or unit routinely visit the provider, at agreed intervals, to monitor the quality of the provision. They are also responsive if there are problems at any point.
- At the same time, the school respects the fact that the provision may look different from 'school' and does not interfere unnecessarily.
- The provider records the student's personal, academic and placement-specific progress as agreed with the school or unit. The student is involved in self-evaluation.
- The school or unit takes note of this information and includes it in their routine tracking of the student's overall progress.
- The school or unit triangulates this with data such as overall attendance, behaviour and progress to evaluate the impact of the provision on the outcomes for the student.
- If a student is not making adequate progress, the school or unit finds out why and responds accordingly, offering support or challenge to the student or the provider concerned, and if necessary, changing the placement.

Positive outcomes

The actual outcomes of attending alternative provision differ from student to student. However, there were some common elements to outcomes of the successful provision.

- The students' enjoyment of their placement leads to good attendance at the placement.
- Students who were previously disaffected start to see the purpose of some of their other lessons in school and, consequently, behaviour improves.
- As students learn new skills, often those which their peers do not have, they become more confident.
- These factors affect their motivation, which in turn has a positive impact on their attendance at school.
- Students gain appropriate accreditation from their placement, which contributes to their qualifications at the end of Year 11, and/or their improved motivation and confidence contribute to achieving the qualifications they are working for in school.
- Students make positive choices about the next steps at the end of Year 11. They choose a college course, or gain an apprenticeship or job, sometimes based on their experiences at their placement.

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