

Commissioning Alternative Provision

Advice for Schools, Sept '26

This handbook should be considered alongside the [Arranging Alternative Provision - A guide for Local Authorities and Schools](#) - DfE February 2025 and [Non-school alternative provision Voluntary national standards](#) - DfE August 2025

Planning and Commissioning of Alternative Provision (AP)

This document is based on statutory and voluntary guidance and provides a set of guiding principles that the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) schools should follow to ensure that children and young people benefit from high quality provision, which is safe, secure and appropriate to their individual needs.

1. What is Alternative Provision (AP)?

AP can be defined as something in which a child participates as part of their regular timetable, away from the site of the school or the pupil referral unit where they are enrolled, and not led by school staff.

Schools can use such provisions to try to prevent exclusions, or to re-engage children in their education. Pupil referral units are themselves a form of AP, but children who are on the roll of a child referral unit may also attend additional forms of AP off site.

The RBWM currently commissions Haybrook College in Slough to deliver its AP. Haybrook currently offers a full time education for secondary aged children (RBWM residents) who have been permanently excluded from schools and for whom another mainstream school is not seen as an appropriate option at this point in time. They also provide permanent placements at The Primary Rise in Eton Wick which is a full time offer for primary aged children who have been permanently excluded.

2. What Schools Should Know.

RBWM does **not** operate an "Approved List" of AP providers. Schools can access a "Working With List" that identifies Non DfE Registered AP that is currently commissioned through the Special Educational Needs Service (this includes those commissioned through Section 19). Responsibility for the AP used rests with the school commissioning the placement. Schools must have a "Quality Assurance" process in place which ensures that Schools are in a position to demonstrate (to a range of stakeholders as well as Ofsted) that any children placed in an AP are receiving an effective education. Good practice would be to present this information to the Governing Body/Trustees as a part of the annual SEND Information Report and included in Attendance data reports.

Schools should carefully consider what APs are available that can meet the needs of their children, including the quality and safety of the provision, costs and value for money.

A personalised plan for intervention should be prepared by the school commissioning the AP: setting clear objectives for improvement and attainment, timeframes, arrangements for assessment and monitoring progress, and a baseline of the current position against which to measure progress. Plans should be linked to other relevant information or activities such as EHCPs for children with SEND and Children Services Plans. This should include a reintegration plan as part of the ongoing commitment. A pro forma [Intervention Plan for Schools](#) to use is available.

The school commissioning the placement should maintain on-going contact with the provider and the child, with clear procedures in place to exchange information, monitor progress, attendance and provide pastoral support.

The school commissioning the placement should maintain a full record of all placements they make, including a child's progress, achievements and destination following the placement. This should also include the child's own assessment of their placement. The school must complete an [AP Notification Form](#) for each child who accesses an AP (including if part funded through the Pupils Educationally at Risk Panel or if named on a Child's Education Health and Care Plan) which can be accessed using this [link](#).

Children attending Alternative Provision would be coded as per the [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#) guidance/legislation. These would be "K" if arranged by the LA through an EHCP or "B" if educated offsite and does not fit into K, P, V or W codes.

3. What is Good Alternative Intervention/Provision?

Good AP is that which appropriately meets the needs of a child and enables them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers. Provision will differ from child to child, but DfE say provision should:

- Have a clear purpose with a focus on education and achievement as well as meeting the child's needs and rigorous assessment of progress.
- Offer appropriate and challenging teaching in English, Mathematics and Science (including IT) on par with mainstream education - unless this is being provided elsewhere within a package of provision.
- Be suited to the child's capabilities; give children the opportunity to take appropriate qualifications and involve suitably qualified staff who can help children make excellent progress.
- Have good arrangements for working with other relevant services such as social care, education psychology, child and adolescent mental health services, youth offending teams, and drug support services, etc.

Schools should also ensure that:

- The specific personal, social and academic needs of children are properly identified and met in order to help them to overcome any barriers to attainment.
- Intervention and Provision leads to improved child motivation and self-confidence, attendance and engagement with education.
- The Provision has clearly defined objectives that are regularly reviewed, including the next steps following the placement such as reintegration into mainstream education, further education, training or employment.

4. Key Points for Consideration before placing a child in Alternative Provision

- Have the child's, parents and relevant school staff been spoken to before a decision about alternative provision has been made?
- Are the nature of the intervention, objectives and timeline clearly defined?
- If the child has an EHCP there must be agreement from the SEC Case Coordinator
- If the child has a Child Protection Plan or is a Child In Need then the Social Worker must be informed and agree.
- What other considerations are there, such as transport arrangements?
- What does the child want, or need, to get from the intervention or provision?
- How long should the intervention or provision be for?
- Is it part time or full time? If part-time, the child should attend school as usual on the days they are not in the AP.
- How will it fit with the child's mainstream curriculum? If part-time or temporary, it should complement and keep up with the child's current curriculum, timetable and qualification route.
- What will success look like at the end of the intervention or provision?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve – particularly in the areas of attendance, attitude, attainment, behaviour and positive destination?

5. Quality Assurance Evaluation Framework.

- Each AP on the RBWM AP Directory has access to the QA Evaluation Framework and will provide to schools prior to commissioning a placement which the school will RAG rate to ensure due diligence
- Each AP on the RBWM Directory can access the AP Network Meeting that runs at least every full term across the academic year to ensure consistency across the borough and provide additional support.
- Each AP on the RBWM AP Directory are invited to join the Designated Safeguarding Lead network meetings that run termly across the academic year.

Safeguarding

NB: The school retains the responsibility for the safeguarding of the child even whilst they are placed at an AP.

NB: Check the registration status of each provider and whether they should be registered if they are not. Never use provision which contravenes the registration regulations.

- Commissioning schools must satisfy themselves that providers are compliant with the statutory guidance [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026](#) and [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026](#)
- A key part of this process should be school staff ensuring that staff at the registered AP have appropriate checks, for example Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks and that the staff are suitably qualified.
- Providers must have a Designated Safeguarding Lead and deputy and evidence that they undertaken the relevant, up to date and appropriate training.
- Schools should give providers information in writing about the school's expectations for child protection and procedures they should follow if they have a concern about a child.
- Schools should give providers information in writing about social networking, the use of social media and e-safety, making the school's expectations clear.
- Schools may want to support providers to access appropriate safeguarding training and information.
- Schools must give providers information in writing about how the school should be informed of attendance and agree to the subsequent follow up of absence. This is an essential part of the School's safeguarding procedures.
- In their pre inspection phone call Ofsted will ask how many APs the school uses and how many children are at AP.
- It is recommended that school visits each AP and records observations in a proforma.
- It is the school's responsibility to track attendance or their child's attending AP

Health and Safety

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a duty on employers, including AP to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees, and others who are affected by their activities such as young people on educational placements. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers have a responsibility to ensure that young people at work (including those attending alternative education provision) are not exposed to risk due to lack of experience, being unaware of existing or potential risks and/or lack of maturity, physical capability etc. The council follows the current guidance by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). This information should be referred to in conjunction with this guidance.

Key Points:

1. The AP has primary responsibility for the health and safety of the child and should be managing any significant risks. Schools should take reasonable steps to satisfy themselves that providers are doing this.
2. Those commissioning and organising AP must be competent and ensure it is appropriate for the child concerned. Provision must be age appropriate and take into consideration any children who might be at greater risk, for example due to health conditions or learning difficulties, so this can be taken into account when planning the placement. This should include details of any medical or neurodivergent conditions as well.
3. Schools should discuss with the provider what the child will be doing during the placement, noting any relevant precautions. The AP can include specific factors for young people into their existing risk assessment as appropriate.
4. Providers must inform parents/carers of any significant health and safety risks to their child on placement and how they are being controlled. Providers must also inform the school.
5. When commissioning AP, relevant health and safety information should be obtained to assess the suitability of the provider. The government's Crown Commercial Service Standardised Pre-Qualification Questionnaire includes information on health and safety which should be considered as part of the process when commissioning alternative education provision. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) have also produced a Public service procurement health and safety checklist which can be used to consider key health and safety issues. These lists are not exhaustive and schools should ensure that adequate health and safety information is obtained.
6. It is the responsibility of schools to decide the extent of checks that are carried out when commissioning provision. This will be based on the type of environment and potential risks involved within the placement. Checks should be kept in proportion to the risks involved
7. In lower risk environments, information gained may be relatively straight forward and limited, whilst in environments with less familiar risks or for those in higher risk environments, such as construction, agriculture, manufacturing or motor vehicle repairs, as well as workshop/machinery environments etc.; the checks will need to be more robust.
8. Schools should satisfy themselves that adequate health and safety arrangements are in place and the work the child will be doing is being effectively managed to ensure their health and safety. This will need to include; induction, training, supervision, site familiarisation and any protective equipment that might be needed etc. In addition, children should know how and who to raise health and safety concerns.
9. Schools should also check that the provider understands the specific factors relevant to young people at work, including certain industry specific prohibitions and limitations.
10. For all environments, the local authority strongly recommends that a physical check of the provider and placement is carried out by a competent person. A competent person is somebody who has suitable training, skills, experience and knowledge. Physical checks should look at the general suitability of workplace / education conditions, housekeeping, toilets and washing facilities, fire precautions, guarding of machines, provision of any necessary protective equipment etc. This list is not exhaustive and there may be other important aspects to consider dependent upon the type of environment and risks involved.
11. There should also be agreement on key points of contact between the provider and school during the placement to discuss any issues or concerns. This includes the reporting of any serious accidents or incidents to the school who should follow their own employer's accident reporting procedure.

12. Schools should carry out appropriate monitoring throughout the placement to satisfy themselves that providers are continuing to manage the health and safety of children on placement. This could be undertaken as part of a general quality assurance visit to assess the overall effectiveness of the provision using a proforma. Health and safety checks should be undertaken by a competent person and be kept in proportion to the environment and risks involved. Checks should be recorded. Providers should complete the Statement of Significant Risks & Control Measures Form. For further information and advice, schools should contact their health and safety advice provider. For more information on health and safety competent advice, refer to: <https://www.hse.gov.uk> Schools where NCC is the employer should contact the [NCC Corporate Health & Safety Service](#).

Curriculum offer:

Schools should ensure that the AP has a curriculum offer which matches the interests and needs of the child. It must be one which will engage the child and maintain their interest – particularly for a child at risk of non-attendance.

For KS4 children, the AP should be able to offer appropriate qualifications, if required, which are recognised by Further Education establishments in the area. The AP should also support post 16 options.

Assessment procedures clearly identified and matched to the needs of the child.

Advice Information and Guidance embedded across the curriculum offer.

Other policies and procedures:

There are a range of other policies that you may need to check and here are just a few. This list may vary according to the needs of the child - further policies are identified in the [AP Quality Assurance Evaluation Framework](#).

- Safeguarding Policy
- The written behaviour policy, setting out amongst other matters, the sanctions/consequences to be adopted in the event of a child's dysregulation or misbehaviour
- SEND Policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Complaints procedure
- Arrangements for administering First Aid

What are Schools Responsible for?

NB Once a placement has been agreed, the ***school maintains responsibility*** for:

- Pupil welfare: safeguarding, child protection; health and safety.
- Sharing all relevant information with the provider including any information on SEND, literacy, safeguarding or other issues.
- Ensuring that parents and the LA have clear information about the placement - why, when, where, and how it will be reviewed. For the LA this can be provided through the [AP Notification Form](#) and [Intervention Plan](#)
- Setting out in writing the agreed objectives and plans for the placement, and monitoring progress against the objectives of the placement, including carrying out frequent visits to the provider.
- Where reintegration to school is an objective, planning for and providing an appropriate package of support to assist the child's reintegration.
- Involving parents (and LA if a child has EHCP or open to social care) in regular reviews of the placement.

- Attendance monitoring and follow-up of absences. **Appendix B**
- Meeting the needs identified within a child's EHC Plan.
- Transport arrangements.
- Where a child is eligible for free school meals, this will need communicating to the provider and suitable arrangements made.
- Sanctioning a suspension or permanent exclusion; children are legally on the roll of a school and therefore only the child's home school can sanction these.
- Ongoing contact with the child and provider to exchange information, monitor progress and provide pastoral support.
- Ensuring the child remains a member of the school community, such as involvement with extra-curricular activities, social events, parents' evenings, letters to parents or child, and rewards.
- Careers guidance, schools to ensure children receive their full entitlement to careers information, advice and guidance.
- Pupil outcomes – obtaining a final report on the child's achievements during the placement including attainment and progress, attendance records and evidence of change in behaviour.
- Seeking a child's views on the success of the placement.
- For Year 11s, working with the provider to prevent young people becoming NEET and ensuring that they can move on to suitable education, training or employment alongside part-time study. Schools should collect and record information about the child's next destination, as an indicator of alternative provision quality.

NB The responsibility for quality assurance and evaluation of the education offered by the Alternative Provision sits with the commissioning school.

What are Alternative Providers Responsible For?

- Ensuring they are compliant with the most recent DfE guidance around legislation and the definition of an alternative provision. **Appendix A**
- Maintaining contact with the commissioning school and the child's parent/carer, with regular updates on the child's progress.
- Carrying out an initial assessment of educational needs for the child within one week of referral to confirm what level of course and support is appropriate.
- Notifying the school of attendance and absence; good practice would determine this is twice daily.
- Providing relevant policies and procedures that relate to the child's welfare, education and safety for example; Safeguarding policy including the use of social media and E-safety, Health and Safety Policy and Behaviour Policy.
- Attending relevant multi-agency meetings around the child when required, for example: Personal Education Plan (PEP) for children looked after, EHCP review meetings and Social Care meetings.
- Having clear monitoring criteria to judge the quality of the teaching and learning, and report this to the commissioning school at agreed intervals.
- Provide a named contact for all matters pertaining to the child.
- Having a DSL who attends the RBWM DSL Network meetings and is aware of all relevant policies and practices.
- Maintaining Individual Learning Plans, these set out the targets that the child will achieve on programme (e.g., L1 Functional Skills English, Pass grade) as well as the wider targets (e.g., 95% attendance, behaviour). All targets must be agreed by all stakeholders.

Statutory Guidance on Alternative Provision and Voluntary National Standards.

- DfE Arranging Alternative Provision -
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67a1ee367da1f1ac64e5fe2c/Arranging_Alternative_Provision_-_A_Guide_for_Local_Authorities_and_Schools.pdf
- Non-school alternative provision Voluntary national standards
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b082f223468ce937e0e94f/non-school-alternative-provision-voluntary-national-standards.pdf>
- DfE 2019 Independent School Registration -
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/865049/BRANDED_independent_school_registration_guidance_21_August_2019Ms.pdf
- DfE 2023 Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school -
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/941900/health_needs_guidance_accessible.pdf
- Ofsted 2013 Pupils Missing Out -
<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/18825/1/childs%20missing%20out%20on%20education.pdf>

Further Reading - Alternative Provision

- Ofsted 2016 Alternative Provision - Findings of a 3 Year Survey -
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-school-provision-findings-of-a-three-year-survey>
- DfE October 2018 Alternative Provision Market Analysis -
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752548/Alternative_Provision_Market_Analysis.pdf
- DfE October 2018 Investigative Research into Alternative Provision -
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748910/Investigative_research_into_alternative_provision.pdf

Appendix A

DfE Registration Requirements for Alternative Providers

Every provider of education that is not a maintained school or academy must be registered as an 'independent school' if it provides **full-time education** to:

- five or more children of compulsory school age, or
- one such child who is looked-after, or
- one such child with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP).

It is an offence to operate an unregistered independent school. Applications for registration by new schools must be submitted and approved before a school begins to operate and admit children. Ofsted may decide to make an unannounced visit to an institution on the basis of information they have received about it operating as an unregistered independent school. If Ofsted consider in the course of such a visit that an institution is operating unlawfully and should cease to operate as a school, they will inform the operator it is an offence to operate without registration and take any appropriate steps with the LA to ensure the premises are closed and the children provided for.

Definition of Full Time Provision

'Full-time education' is not defined in law but DfE says it should equate to what the child would normally have in school – for example, for children in Key Stage 4 full-time education in a school would usually be 25 hours a week.

DfE also say they will consider any institution that is operating during the day for more than 18 hours per week to be providing full time education. This is because the education being provided is taking up the substantial part of the week in which it can be reasonably expected a child can be educated, and therefore indicates that the education provided is the main source of education for that child.

Relevant factors in determining whether education is full-time include, the number of hours per week including breaks and independent study time, the number of weeks in the academic term/year the education is provided, the time of day, and whether the education provision in practice precludes the possibility that full-time education could be provided elsewhere.

All children must receive full-time provision in total, whether in one setting or more, unless a child's medical condition makes full-time provision inappropriate.

Appendix B

Recording and Monitoring Attendance

Each child attending alternative provision commissioned by the school, MUST remain on a school roll and the school retains the ultimate duty of care for pre-16 pupils, wherever they are being educated. Whilst a child is attending an AP, they are 'on loan' from school and providers are obliged to support the school in their duty of care.

To ensure robust safeguarding of children in placement, there is an expectation that schools and providers have a clear agreement about how the school is informed of attendance and the subsequent follow up of absence.

The provider is responsible for enrolling pre-16 children onto their course(s) and for recording, monitoring and reporting attendance and absences. This MUST be completed twice a day, am and pm. This is a legal requirement for any pre-16 group in the same way as it is for post-16 groups ([The Education child Registration \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)).

Attendance Register Codes

Schools are legally responsible for using the correct codes and the importance of using the correct code is also a safeguarding issue.

All sessions when a child is not expected to physically present in school should be marked appropriately using the DfE registration code as follows:

a) **Code B:** Off-site educational activity. This code should be used when a child is present at an off-site educational activity that has been approved by the school. Ultimately schools are responsible for the safeguarding and welfare of children educated off-site. Therefore, by using code B, schools are certifying that the education is supervised, and measures have been taken to safeguard children. This code should not be used for any unsupervised educational activity or where a child is at home doing school work. Schools should ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby the provider of the alternative activity notifies the school of any absences by individual child's. The school should record the child's absence using the relevant code. [309 of TWtISA](#)

b) **Code D:** Dual Registered – at another educational establishment. This code is used to indicate that the child was not expected to attend the session in question because they were scheduled to attend the other school at which they were registered. The main examples of dual registration are children who are attending a child referral unit, a hospital school or a special school on a temporary basis. It can also be used when the child is known to be registered at another school during the session in question. Each school should only record the child's attendance and absence for those sessions that the child is scheduled to attend their school. Schools should ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby all unexplained absence is followed up in a timely manner. [343 of WTtISA](#)

c) **Code K:** Attending an alternative provision/Intervention arranged by the Local Authority and School to meet needs identified in the child's Education Health and Care Plan. The Quality Assurance of these provisions/interventions would be jointly undertaken by both stakeholders. [293 of WTtISA](#)