



Alternative Provision: What's new?

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Over recent years, Alternative Provision (AP) has expanded and evolved in line with the ever-changing landscape of our education system and forms an integral part of it. Approximately, 32,083 children and young people are educated across at least 761 AP settings in England. The Government SEND and alternative provision green paper 2023, sets out a vision to reduce inequalities through a single national SEND and AP system with new standards in offering tailored support for children and young people.

The aim of AP is to address the additional needs of children and young people which are not being met in mainstream schools. AP is accessed when school staff are unable to meet these diverse needs of the children due to lack of training, funding and other resources, and so referrals are made.

Although many children and young people in AP are of secondary school age, the number of primary school children has increased over the last five years. Government analysis from the: *alternative-provision-for-primary-age-pupils-in-england-a-long-term-destination-or-a-temporary-solution? (2022)*, discovered a 27% increase in primary-age pupils in AP over 4 years, from around 5,600 in 2017/18 to about 7,000 in 2020/21.

So, what does Alternative Provision look like?



Under section [19\(3A\) of the Education Act 1996](#), AP should be available '*full time*' for children and young people of compulsory school age. Statutory guidance for AP states that a child or young person should not receive less education than they would if they were in mainstream school. It also states that full time education can be a combination of various part time provisions. However, there is not a statutory definition that constitutes *full time* and consequently this may vary from one local authority to another.

It is important not to lose sight, that the role of AP is to support children and young people to return and fully integrate into mainstream provision where appropriate.

Why are children and young people accessing this provision?

As we know all too well, the Covid-19 Pandemic severely impacted the education system bringing a new set of opportunities and challenges to the most vulnerable children and young people. Many engaged well with remote learning through a calm and purposeful environment. However, for those children and young people in AP and those at risk of being referred it was a

traumatic transitional period that has and may have a long-lasting impact on individual outcomes. It is vital now more than ever that children and young people receive high quality education tailored around their specific needs. In primary schools, 93% of those attending AP were in receipt of an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) or SEN support (Gov. 2022) however the most common area of need was Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH).

The thought of ‘square peg round hole’ springs to mind or is it round peg square hole?

Should we be trying to make our children fit into today’s education system or should we be gaining a deeper understanding involving the needs of individuals to allow for inclusivity?

The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper (2023) explored the present issues within the current SEND system in terms of how to best meet children and young people’s diverse needs. The government’s proposals, within the paper, set out to:

- improve outcomes for children and young people
- improve experiences for families, reducing the current adversity and frustration they face and
- deliver financial sustainability.

Three key challenges have been identified within the paper:

- The system is failing to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- Parents’ confidence in the system is in decline.
- The system has become financially unsustainable.

Alongside issues surrounding SEND and AP, there are concerns over the rise in children and young people in AP following exclusion from mainstream due to issues with behaviour (Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever-increasing exclusions 2019). The report states that this rise has been seen since the increase in zero-tolerance behaviour policies.

In the report, Jules Daulby (Director of Education, Drive Youth Trust), states that there needs to be flex in the system and reasonable adjustments should be made to accommodate behaviours that arise from a child’s special educational needs, and that she does not think that zero-tolerance behaviour policies allow for that. One pupil in the report stated that:

‘there are these little things you just can’t do, or if you do them you can get excluded for it. I think most people are getting permanently excluded, just instantly, in my mainstream school right now. I don’t think they are treating everyone fairly and evenly.’

Evidence from the report states that this increase in zero-tolerance behaviour policies is building an environment within schools where children and young people are being punished and excluded. Ultimately, these behaviour issues could have been managed by schools if appropriate support, training and resources were offered to increase the understanding of need.

Steps towards improvement

The government SEND and Alternative Provision plan 2023, discusses the impact of late intervention on children, young people and their families and how this may lead to a *vicious cycle*, which includes: *lack of common understanding, incentives and shared priorities, misaligned accountabilities, inefficiencies with the use of funding, perverse incentives and delays in accessing support, needs escalate and families/schools seek EHCPs and top up funding, lack of confidence, low inclusivity and poor experiences in mainstream, decision making, resources directed from mainstream to fund increasing numbers of individualised placements with tailored provision.* Responses within the report emphasized concerns and a serious need for change in a system that is hindered by *'inequity, difficult and lengthy processes, and funding shortfalls.'*

A three-tier model has been created in support of AP:

- Tier 1: Targeted support in mainstream
- Tier 2: Time- limited placements
- Tier 3: Transitional placements

These first steps form the start of a journey towards creating *"a society that celebrates, encourages, and enables the success of all children and young people, including those with SEND and in AP. A society where we hold high aspirations for all children and young people, recognising that although success looks different for everyone, it is no less worthy of celebration"* (SEND and AP Improvement Plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time, 2023, p.22).

The aim is to invest £2.6 billion between 2022 – 2025 to fund new places within AP for children and young people with SEND. This transformation of the system also aims to give families the confidence in the types of support their children receive no matter what their need or no matter where in the UK they live.

Signposting, further reading and references.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1139561/SEND_and_alternative_provision_improvement_plan.pdf (Accessed March 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-for-primary-age-pupils-in-england-a-long-term-destination-or-a-temporary-solution/alternative-provision-for-primary-age-pupils-in-england-a-long-term-destination-or-a-temporary-solution>(Accessed March 2023)

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/342/342.pdf> (Accessed March 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan/send-and-alternative-provision-roadmap> (Accessed March 2023)

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/event/the-future-of-alternative-provision-reflections-on-the-opportunities-and-challenges-in-a-post-pandemic-world> (Accessed March 2023)