



Meeting of:	Date	Agenda item	Ward(s)
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee	15 September 2015	B2	All

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SUBJECT: Alternative Provision Scrutiny Review: Introductory Report

1. Background

- 1.1 At any one time, there are a number of pupils whose learning outcomes are at risk from issues such as behaviour and risk of exclusion. This may impact on their ability to benefit from their school curriculum offer and require alternative provision to be made for them as a last resort prior to exclusion. A number of young people from alternative provision may not be in education, employment or training between 16 and 18 years old.
- 1.2 Since 2010, Islington has had a significant number of students referred to alternative provision. Islington also has a higher number of young people in alternative provision than neighbouring boroughs. However, the figure is reducing in Islington and there are currently 40 less referrals to AP than this time last year. It is imperative that the number of AP students is further reduced to improve the prospects of positive attainment, social and wellbeing outcomes for this group of young people. This report provides the committee with contextual information for their scrutiny of alternative provision in Islington.

2. The national and local context

- 2.1 Alternative provision (AP) is defined as “*education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.*” It can take the form of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), independent projects from the private or voluntary sector and placements in Further Education Colleges. The duties and powers relating to alternative provision are covered in 10 pieces of legislation.
- 2.2 An alternative provision provider should be registered as an independent or free school if it meets the criteria for registration (five or more full-time pupils of compulsory school age, or one such pupil who is looked-after or has a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)). All AP Free Schools and independent schools must be registered whether or not they are full- or part-time. All provision used by Islington is registered with Ofsted and the Department for Education (DFE).
- 2.3 Statutory guidance expects good alternative provision to enable pupils to achieve good educational attainment on par with their peers regardless of circumstances or settings. Provision should:
- identify and enable pupils to overcome specific personal, social and academic needs;
 - improve motivation, self-confidence, attendance and engagement with education;
 - enable good academic attainment with appropriate accreditation and qualifications; and
 - have clearly defined objectives and next steps following the placement such as further education, employment, training or reintegration into mainstream education.
- 2.4 There have been a number of best practice approaches developed to improve behaviour, discipline, exclusions and alternative provision. The main emphasis has been that exclusion from school must not mean exclusion from education. Recent policy attempts to modernise alternative provision for young people include the Education Act 2011 and the 2012 report from the previous Coalition Government’s Expert Adviser, Charlie Taylor. The Taylor report “*Improving Alternative Provision*” had 28 recommendations to raise standards in alternative provision including:
- Schools taking on responsibility for funding and commissioning alternative provision;
 - Central government setting new clear commissioning standards for alternative provision;
 - Ofsted focusing on alternative provision as part of its inspection programme;
 - Adopting approaches to prevention, early intervention and early support so that exclusion is the last resort;
 - Giving PRUs the opportunity to convert to Academies; and
 - More emphasis placed on English and maths.
- 2.5 Through a series of surveys and inspections, Ofsted identified a number of recurring areas for improvement in AP nationally. The weaknesses included safeguarding, poor reporting on academic progress and outcomes including targets for students, monitoring of the quality of provision, knowledge of school governors’ knowledge and the evaluation of impact of the provision on students’ outcomes. The revised Ofsted framework requires inspectors to assess the progress and outcomes for those students placed by a school onto alternative provision.

The role and responsibilities of local authorities, schools and academies

- 2.6 Governing bodies of schools and Academies are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education from the sixth day of a fixed period exclusion. Schools may direct pupils off-site for education to help improve their behaviour. Academies can arrange off-site provision for similar purposes.
- 2.7 Local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for permanently excluded pupils, and for other pupils who – because of illness or other reasons – would not receive suitable education without such arrangements being made. This includes all children resident in the local

authority area of compulsory school age regardless of whether they are on a school roll and whatever type of school they attend. Whatever the form of provision, the local authority remains accountable for the quality of education. Currently 9 out of the 10 secondary schools work in conjunction with the local authority when placing Year 10 and 11 pupils on alternative provision. Both schools and the local authority can commission directly from providers and ensure that the provision is of high quality with robust systems in place for monitoring.

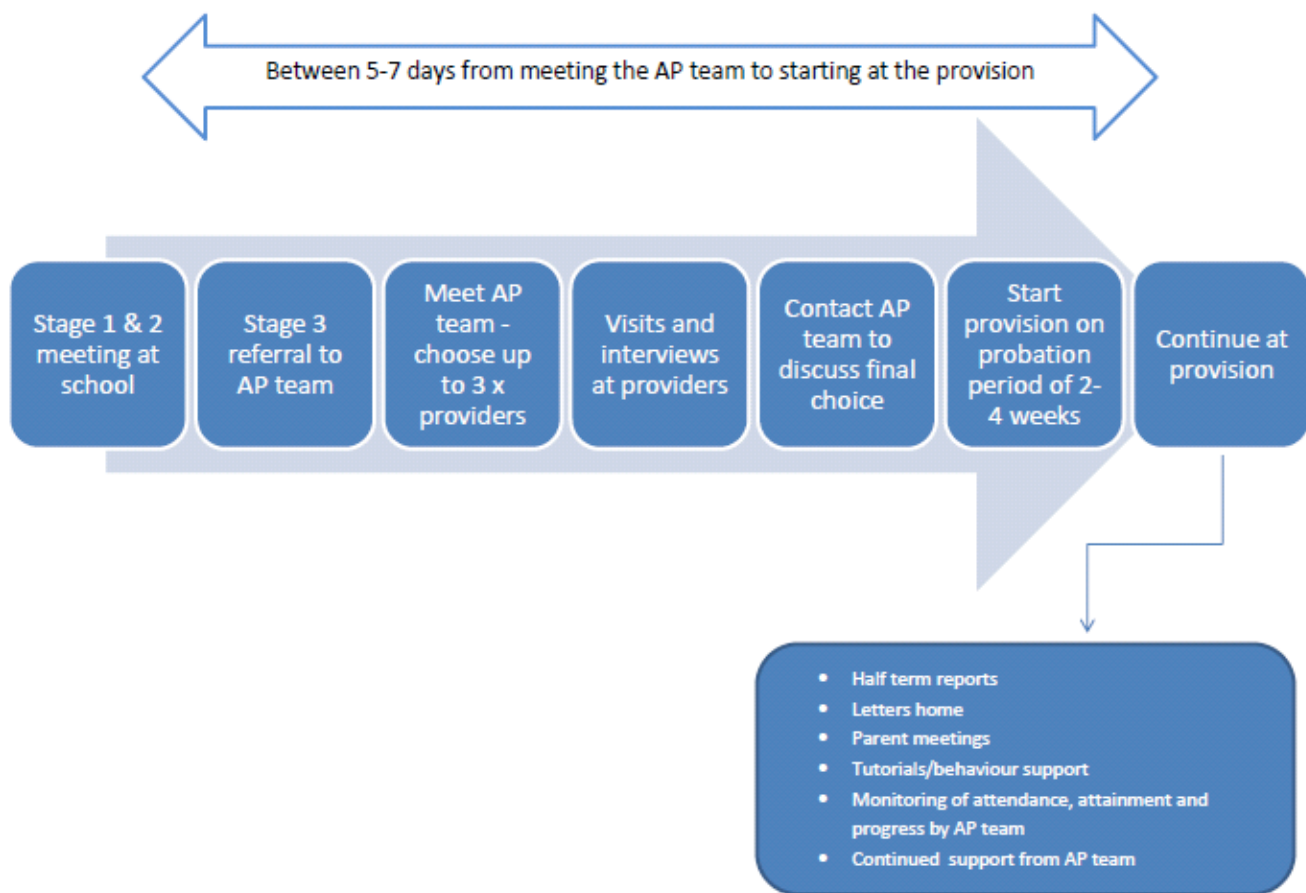
3. The reasons why children are in alternative provision – a snapshot

- 3.1 Islington has had a significant number of students referred to alternative provision. Over the past three years, this has varied between 150 and 200 pupils. However, this is reducing. The Council's AP team is working hard with schools to reduce the number of AP students. The current number of referrals for 2015/16 is 103 students with a view to this number not exceeding 125 students this academic year. For 2016/17, the plan is to further reduce the number of referred students to 100.
- 3.2. The majority of the cohort is made up of white males from non-working families. There are a range of behavioural and emotional needs. Of the current cohort at least 90 families have had some form of intervention from agencies within Islington. For example, Youth Offending service, Targeted Youth Support, Families First, IFIT, AMASS and Children's Social Care.
- 3.3 The main reasons for referral to AP are behaviour, attendance, risk of exclusion and a desire to do a vocational offer not provided by the school. Most students are referred by schools due to poor behaviour and/or low attendance. Schools are required to submit very detailed information on the pupil including the steps they have taken to support the pupil to remain in mainstream school. Attendance on alternative provision varies which is dependent on the provider. However, over 60% of the cohort has an attendance rate of less than 95%.
- 3.4 Over 80% of the cohort leaves with a qualification which is a rise of over 40 percentage points since 2010. Where pupils still struggle is with achieving Level 1 (D-G at GCSE) or above in both English and maths. A heavy focus has been placed on raising attainment in these subjects with results expected to improve this academic year. A focused effort is made to ensure students have a positive destination for Year 12 which has resulted in a year-on-year reduction in the number of AP students recorded as NEET by November each year. It has been noticed that the number of students NEET rises during Year 12 when pupils appear to drop off their courses.

4. The local AP arrangements

- 4.1 In Islington, all referrals go through the Council's alternative provision team. This means that the borough is aware of all pupils placed out of mainstream school in 9 secondary schools and New River College. COLA-I place all of their pupils onto AP via New River College meaning that the borough is still able to monitor these placements as data is shared. Figure 1 outlines the alternative provision process.

Figure 1: The Alternative Provision journey



- 4.2 Each secondary school has a nominated member of staff from the senior leadership team that is responsible for pupils placed out of school. The school decides which pupils they are referring and the reasons for the referral. An Information Passport is completed by the school and requires the school to complete three stages before a pupil can be referred. Each stage of the process needs the school to work with the pupil, parent and any other professionals involved with the family. In most cases, the schools refer pupils to AP themselves. This has implications for the pupil as not all schools will monitor and track pupil progress, attainment, attendance and well-being.
- 4.3 Schools are invited to attend Quality Assurance visits and engage by sending senior leaders to sit on the panel of inspectors. After each visit the completed report is posted on the “Alternative Pathways” website so that all schools can view reports and outcomes. The local authority supports schools to make sure that pupils are placed into a provision that matches their needs and learning ambitions. The team regularly monitor and track attendance and progress and feed back to the school once a half term. The feedback includes reports written by providers on each student. The local authority organises and leads on Quality Assurance visits, working closely with providers to raise standards of education and improved results.
- 4.4 There are currently 15 providers¹ used by Islington. The number of student placements varies from one to 20 individuals. In the last two years, 11 out of 15 providers have had a full Quality Assurance visit in the last two years and completed a Quality Improvement Plan which is reviewed every half term with the AP team. Out of those 11 providers, 6 were graded “Good” and five were graded “Requires Improvement”.

¹ Please refer to the booklet ‘Alternative Provision 2015-2016’ for explanations of courses and providers. This was provided to members of the Committee as background reading.

Alternative provision funding framework and ensuring value for money

- 4.5 Schools fully fund alternative provision through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Funding for each provision varies in cost ranging from £4,580 to £14,000 per child per academic year.

5. Opportunities to make local arrangements more effective

- 5.1 There are four main focus areas to make local arrangements more effective. These are:
1. to reduce referrals to alternative provision through early identification and support of those at risk;
 2. to reduce the overall number of young people on alternative provision;
 3. to improve the quality of alternative provision, and increase the opportunities for further education and training – particularly Level 2 qualifications;
 4. to support the most vulnerable once they are on alternative provision.
- 5.2 A recent reflection on alternative provision highlighted several issues that are currently being worked through. For example, some schools refer more students to AP than others and the current system means that young people on AP are not included in schools' GCSE results. Young people rarely integrate back into mainstream school from Alternative Provision. There was also a need to further improve the quality of English and Maths tuition within AP and reinforcing messages to families about attendance.

Improving attendance and attainment

- 5.3 Although there have been some improvements in **attendance**, more than 50% of the cohort are persistent absentees. In order to improve this:
- There is an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) in post 5 days a week for AP since June 2014;
 - The AP team and EWO meet every two weeks to discuss cases and put in place actions for each individual which are recorded;
 - Regular meetings take place with students and parents to ensure EWO procedures are followed;
 - Letters are sent home for non-attendance and also to recognise where there has been improvements in attendance;
 - Once a week a thorough check of the registers and Collaborative Learning Manager (CLM)² is made and providers are chased for missing information;
 - Islington leaflets on attendance are sent home to all parents once a half term;
 - The AP team seek support from other agencies within the council to help reinforce the need for regular attendance;
 - There is early identification of students who had poor attendance at their home school. The EWO met with students in the summer to support them and put plans in place;
 - The EWO works with providers and supports them to improve attendance.
- 5.4 To improve **attainment**, the current actions are:
- Half termly meetings with individual providers to look at predicted grades, pupil improvement plans, in class support – heavy focus on maths and English;
 - Marking of pupils work is sampled and actions given to provider to improve marking or where appropriate share good practice;
 - Lesson observations with feedback;
 - Pupil questionnaires;
 - Staff training for subject teachers on key areas in conjunction with the North London Children's Efficiency Board;

² This is the electronic register system which providers log into and record attendance and reasons for absence.

- Provider meetings where all providers attend to share ideas, good practice and receive relevant information.

Refocusing early intervention

- 5.5 Research consistently shows that life chances are significantly reduced for pupils who spend a significant amount of time out of mainstream school or whose education is disrupted. The team believe that by working closely with schools to identify potential alternative provision students in Year 7/8, the numbers can be reduced at the point of referral, in Year 10 and 11. If pupils are identified early, extra support can be given to ensure that the pupil remains in mainstream school. This support will be in the form of Early Help Assessments making sure that both the pupil and their family are given the option of a wraparound service to address needs. The AP team is currently in the process of appointing an IFIT worker who will work with three schools (highest referrers) to reduce their numbers and ensure that the pupils and their families are referred to the right agencies.

Background paper: Alternative Provision 2015-2016

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