

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Alternative Provision Scrutiny 2015/16

Draft Recommendations

1. The alternative provision referral process be strengthened in order to increase the accountability of schools and potentially reduce the number of pupils referred. It is recommended that a formal referral panel be established to consider applications for referral, the membership of which should include senior school representatives and relevant council officers. This panel should have the authority to approve or decline applications and make recommendations associated with the child's education where appropriate.
2. To ensure that the educational and other needs of pupils are identified and that they have access to appropriate support, a standardised assessment framework be introduced for those pupils proposed to be referred to alternative provision. Such assessments should be carried out by schools before pupils are referred to alternative provision.
3. Guidance be produced to support schools in making applications to the referral panel, and to assist the referral panel in decision-making. When considering a referral the panel should consider factors such as the needs of the pupil identified via assessment, the support available to the pupil inside and outside of school, the pupil's long term aspirations, attainment levels and the wishes of the pupil.
4. All pupils should have the opportunity to study GCSEs and should be encouraged and supported to do so. The council should aspire for all pupils to achieve at least a grade C in GCSE English and Maths.
5. The council should encourage schools to implement targeted interventions for pupils at risk of referral to alternative provision. Such interventions should not narrowly focus on attainment, but should seek to raise aspirations, identify pathways and develop pupil resilience. The Committee is especially keen for such interventions to begin in primary school.
6. The council should continue to develop its wrap-around early help services for pupils at risk of referral to alternative provision in partnership with schools. It should be the aim to provide comprehensive and integrated support to pupils at risk of referral and their families at the earliest possible stage, in order to reduce the need for alternative provision by Key Stage 4.
7. Shared learning should be facilitated between schools and alternative provision providers to increase standards in both settings. This could develop the teaching skills of alternative provision providers and assist schools in implementing the most effective behaviour management techniques for challenging pupils.

8. The Committee identified the “never give up” approach adopted by schools such as Highbury Fields to be best practice. Alternative provision should only be used as a last resort once all other attempts to engage the child in mainstream education have been exhausted. However, to ensure the best outcomes for the children that are referred due to exceptional circumstances, the council should work with schools and providers to improve the perception of alternative provision. It is important that alternative provision is viewed as a fresh start and a legitimate alternative to mainstream education for those who truly need it and not as a setting for failed pupils. Alternative provision should not be used as a threat.
9. It is important that schools do not consider pupils to be “out of sight, out of mind” once they are referred to alternative provision. Whilst referral back to mainstream education is not always possible or desirable, it may be appropriate and beneficial in some instances for the pupil to remain a member of the school community, especially as schools are still accountable for their outcomes. Schools should remain actively involved in the welfare of pupils, especially on matters such as safeguarding and attendance, and should consider involving pupils in extra-curricular activities as appropriate.
10. The council review the options and pathways available for pupils wanting to study vocational qualifications at Key Stage 4, to ensure that the demand for vocational education does not contribute towards the need for alternative provision.
11. As alternative provision pupils tend to have a higher level of need and vulnerabilities, the council should review the SEN and CAMHS support available to alternative provision pupils and consider increasing the level of support if required.
12. The council should seek to further develop information sharing systems between the alternative provision service and other relevant areas of the council to ensure that the best interests of children are secured.
13. The council should review its post-16 employment and skills outreach support offer to alternative provision pupils. The level of advisory support offered by alternative provision providers varies and a minimum offer should be agreed to ensure the best outcomes for pupils.
14. The Committee believes that alternative provision pupils should be achieving the benchmark of 95% attendance. There should be clear escalation policies around pupil attendance, with a robust accountability framework supporting this.
15. The Council should only use alternative provision providers that have a broad outlook and high aspirations for their pupils; providers should focus on academic achievement and personal skills as well as pupil behaviour.

The Scrutiny Initiation Document is appended for reference.