

Practice guide

SEND & Alternative Provision

Alternative Provision – Quality assurance, Sefton

Background, purpose and rationale

Sefton's approach to Alternative Provision (AP) needed to be developed through the principles outlined in the Department for Education's [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#). This required us to align AP with the wider SEND system more fully, ensuring pupils with additional needs received appropriate support within a structured and accountable framework.

What we did to improve families' outcomes and experiences

Initial partnership working with Wirral and Derby was undertaken to consider the scope of other local authorities maintained and commissioned provision, alongside data management and quality assurance (QA) models. Our starting point was to develop an alternative provision quality assurance framework to ensure that there is an improved understanding of the provider and the unique offer each setting provides within the borough and wider region. To achieve this, an Alternative Provision Partnership was established in Spring 2024 to develop commissioning and quality assurance frameworks, ensuring that the process is suitable for both registered and unregistered forms of provision. Membership of the newly established Partnership includes: headteachers (primary, secondary, special and Chairs of Sefton's Associations of Primary and Secondary Headteachers) alongside representatives of local authority SEN, inclusion, 14-19 participation, and schools support services.

An initial provider conference took place in January 2024. School commissioned providers agreed to the principle of being included within the directory of providers, subject to engagement with the quality framework, including use of agreed pre-placement checks. In Spring 2024, an engagement and marketplace event took place with schools and AP Providers.

Training sessions took place with school staff during summer and autumn 2024, to ensure key staff with responsibility for AP pupils were aware of pre-placement check expectations when commissioning placements. Formats have been made available to schools for registered and unregistered settings through our Sefton Education Schools' Portal. The Portal is also used for schools to access key documentation including pre-placement templates, DfE guidance and any associated training links.

Providers self-evaluate against the QA framework; QA visits have been undertaken by Inclusion Consultant, Seconded AP Strategic Lead and our 14-19 Participation Officer. Reports identify recommendations and action points and are to be tracked through annual visits. For the next annual

cycle of visits, which will begin in Spring 2025, providers will be expected to self-evaluate against the criteria and any action/development points arising from the previous visit. Completed QA reports are available via Provider details within the AP directory pages. We are currently trialling our key documentation with Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) settings and developing a protocol with our commissioning team for sourcing of EOTAS providers through NWADCS Placements Northwest Purchasing System.

A third-party provider, Different Class Solutions, was recently commissioned to support tracking of attendance data and help maintain oversight of the purpose, duration and outcomes for learners across the AP sector, which once fully established, will help inform and prioritise pupil needs. Training in attendance recording and tracking is currently being rolled out for school and LA staff with responsibility for pupils in AP. Our ambition is for all our AP pupils, placements, timetabling arrangements, and attendance data to be tracked and monitored at both school and LA level. We intend to use available data to inform a coproduced AP strategy and sufficiency needs in line with the revised DFE guidance.

What was the impact?

Since Spring 2024, 21 providers have received quality LA quality assurance visits. Providers have received written RAG (red, amber, green) rated reports following visits which are shared on the Schools' Portal. Following initial quality assurance visits, key areas which have been addressed with providers this year have focused on:

- Ensuring there is informed, written parental consent and that pupil views are gathered at the point of referral
- Ensuring providers have a more comprehensive understanding of the Section 175 Safeguarding Audit.

Consequently, providers on the approved directory will be eligible to access schools Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training through the local Safeguarding Partnership. We have also been able to support sufficiency of provision, with one more registered Alternative Provision in the local area. AP providers are better informed and aware of the extent and importance of compliance standards expected as part of local authority engagement and quality assurance processes.

Resources

[EHCP Quality Assurance Toolkit](#)

[EHCP Quality Assurance Process](#)

Find out more

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