

Practice guide

SEND and Alternative Provision

Education Otherwise Than In School or College (EOTISC), Wirral

Background, purpose and rationale

Previously in Wirral, EOTISC was managed by the SEND caseworker or parent/carer(s) via direct payments (DPs). This offered the flexibility for bespoke arrangements but there was a lack of consistent oversight to monitor quality, attendance, safeguarding or progress which often led to educational inequalities. Many packages were also designed as standalone arrangements without a structured reintegration pathway back to an educational setting which misaligned with the core purpose of EOTISC. There was insufficient control over non-school arrangements via DPs and the Council maintains full legal responsibility for ensuring compliance with statutory duties and safeguarding quality standards when EOTISC is named in Section I of an Education, Health and Care Plan.

What we did to improve children's outcomes

To support bespoke and high-quality EOTISC provision, Wirral commissions Orrets Meadow School, an Ofsted-registered special school, with an outsourced provision model. This arrangement enables the local authority to legally and effectively commission bespoke provision (including non-school arrangements) while maintaining overall oversight of compliance, accountability and safeguarding quality standards through regular review meetings. The provision is designed collaboratively with parent/carer(s) based on individual EHCP needs and will usually include elements of tuition, therapeutic support, mentoring and community-based activities with a clear focus on reintegration pathways. The package is quality assured, monitored, coordinated and overseen by an Orrets Meadow EOTISC Coordinator, who serves as the central point of contact between the family, commissioned providers, and Wirral LA to ensure robust communication between all parties. Wirral's Alternative Provision Portal ('The Guild') is used by Orrets Meadow School to manage referrals and monitor progress/attendance.

Wirral's Commissioning Model includes:

- The LA arranges and commissions EOTAS: this option is only suitable when all provision is delivered through registered provision or professionals subject to regulation by recognised regulatory bodies.
- Orrets Meadow Commissioned Packages: enabling use of non-school provision, coordinated by an EOTISC Coordinator and tracked via Wirral's Alternative Provision Portal.
- Direct Payments are permitted only with panel approval and require oversight, qualified providers, financial accountability and clear outcomes aligned with the EHCP and reintegration pathway. In these circumstances, the LA requests evidence to be submitted to reflect regular reviews which should take the form of a termly progress report.

What was the impact?

- **Improved educational outcomes:** high-quality, tailored provision ensures continuity of learning and supporting progress towards ECHP outcomes.
- **Enhanced safeguarding and wellbeing:** robust oversight and safeguarding protocols protect vulnerable learners, reducing risks associated with isolation and unregulated provision.
- **Successful reintegration:** clear, structured reintegration plans help children return to mainstream or specialist settings as soon as appropriate, promoting social inclusion and long-term stability.
- **Compliance and accountability:** strong governance ensures adherence to statutory duties, including Section 96 compliance, safeguarding standards, and SEND Code of Practice requirements.
- **Family confidence and engagement:** improved communication and collaborative planning to build trust with families, empowering them while maintaining LA responsibility.
- **Cost-effectiveness and value for money:** well-managed arrangements reduce duplication, prevent escalation to more costly interventions, and ensure resources are used efficiently.
- **Better understanding of local market and provider relationships:** effective commissioning and oversight give valuable insight into the local provider market, enabling the LA to identify high-quality, compliant providers and foster strong relationships for future EOTISC provision. This supports strategic planning and market shaping in line with local needs.

Resources

EOTA Tracker Template

Action Log Template

Find out more

sendcommissioning@wirral.gov.uk