Department for Education

Alternative Provision: Effective Practice and Post 16 Transition

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Historically, Local Authorities have maintained Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) to cater for those students temporarily or permanently excluded or at risk of exclusion; these are a form of alternative provision (AP). Pupils may be registered solely with the PRU or be dual registered, attending both their mainstream school and the PRU on a part-time basis. Additionally, there is a broad range of other AP on offer, provided by independent schools, further education colleges, charities and businesses. AP may be therapeutic in nature, for example for children with severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), mental or physical health issues (including hospital schools), or it may offer vocational learning.

Pupils in 2014 who ended Key Stage 4 (KS4) in alternative provision make up 1% of all KS4 pupils but 4% of all NEET (not in education, employment or training) 16 year olds (Department for Education, Destinations of key stage 4 and key stage 5 pupils: 2014). This suggests that there are significant challenges in achieving successful transitions to participation in post-16 education or training. The Educational Excellence Everywhere White Paper (March 2016) set out the Government's commitment to reforming alternative provision in order to deliver better outcomes and better value for taxpayers. This includes reducing the proportion of young people who become NEET. Accountability arrangements will change so that a pupil's mainstream school will retain accountability for their educational outcomes and will take a lead role in commissioning their provision, including for those who have been permanently excluded. The White Paper also proposed an innovation fund to test new approaches to support pupils who move directly from AP to post-16 education, exploring opportunities for social impact bonds and other innovative funding models.

Research objectives

The Department for Education commissioned this literature review to explore the evidence for effective strategies that support young people in alternative provision to increase attainment at key stage 4 and to make a successful transition to post-16 provision. This includes reporting on any differential effects by pupil characteristics, including gender, ethnicity and special educational needs and disability (SEND).

The literature review will be used to inform decisions on how to make best use of the AP Innovation Fund, ensuring good value for money by targeting resources at the approaches and methods that have the most potential for success.

The review focuses on the following themes:

- what is effective in supporting progression from AP to post-16 participation;

- what practices have been shown to be ineffective and for which groups of young people; and
- where the evidence is most secure/most limited.

Methodology

A protocol was developed and agreed with DfE which included: the locations/sources to be searched; the screens for inclusion/exclusion; the processes for recording and storing references and for summarising literature. This ensured consistency and transparency in the execution of the review.

Using the protocol, the team searched a wide range of online databases and websites, which offer electronic access to most published literature, including academic online bibliographic databases (such as ERIC, Web of Knowledge, Education Research Abstracts Online, British Education Index, BERA Abstracts and JSTOR) and Open access databases (such as Google Scholar and the Directory of Open Access Journals).

Using search terms agreed with DfE we made online searches for relevant reports and research publications. We also reviewed relevant Ofsted thematic reports and a sample of 20 inspection reports for evidence of successful approaches in regulated provision. We supplemented these searches by searching the reference sections of particularly relevant pieces to identify other pertinent articles.

In total, 85 documents were included in the review (26 peer reviewed journal articles, 39 research reports and 20 Ofsted inspection reports).

Literature review – key findings

Monitoring quality and impact:

- Relatively few AP programmes are rigorously evaluated and monitored by schools and AP providers.

- AP staff are generally keen on the possibilities of evaluation and tracking young people after they leave programmes but find it difficult to find the time and resources to collect and analyse anything but the most basic data.

- Some providers collect basic data on their pupils following transition into post-16 learning, or employment. Although this data does not evidence the additionality of AP (the extent to which positive pupil outcomes happen as a result of AP and would not have occurred in the absence of AP), it does give an indication of whether or not a programme is contributing to the achievement of positive post-16 transitions.

- More work is needed to examine the effectiveness and reliability of tools to

measure the outcomes of AP.

Understanding pupils needs:

- Referral to AP should be on the basis of a comprehensive assessment of the pupil's needs and aspirations, with input from the pupil and his/her parents or carers, to ensure that the selected provision is a good match.
- For most young people, especially those with complex issues, provision is likely to be an individualised package often involving more than one provider as even pupils with similar socio-economic backgrounds or with SEND can vary enormously in their needs.
- Providers need to conduct their own assessment of pupils' needs as part of a 'fresh start' approach, and that assessment should include consideration of wider needs as well as those related to learning.
- Assessment should include understanding pupils' aspirations for post-16 to ensure that the academic and/or vocational offer supports their progression.
- Within AP, teachers need to be able to adapt programmes and tasks to the individual needs and learning styles of pupils. This approach is more successful than those which require the pupil to adapt to the programme.

Communication and partnerships:

- Involving parents and carers in a positive way can help counter negative perceptions of alternative provision and enable them to provide better support to their son or daughter which, in turn, can lead to improved outcomes.

- Partnership approaches with mainstream schools support successful reintegration as well as having the potential for the two types of schools to learn from each other.

- Partnerships with colleges and employers improve the chances of young people continuing to participate in education and training and this can include APs providing support post transition.

Positive relationships:

- Positive relationships with staff in AP settings are not just the foundation of positive learning experiences, but constitute important social learning in their own right. Mastering the ability to develop respectful adult relationships is necessary for successful progression into further education or employment.

- Relationships with trusted support workers that continue beyond the placement in AP can help young people to make positive transitions post-16 where their engagement can be fragile.

Autonomy and choice:

- Allowing young people a degree of autonomy and choice in their learning and environment helps them to participate in the building of a community with a shared purpose and positive social relationships, securing their engagement.

- Being given appropriate choices enhances the capacity of young people to act independently and make better choices, enabling them to 'become someone different'.

Behaviour management:

- Many AP settings use a mixture of rewards and sanctions to manage behaviour, with clarity of the rules and their consistent application being seen as supporting positive outcomes.

- There are concerns that, while behaviourist techniques (which emphasise the importance of teaching pupils how to behave appropriately through positive reinforcement and the use of sanctions) are effective in the short-term, more therapeutic interventions may be needed to help students develop the self-management skills they need to make successful transitions into work or further education.

- There are some reported benefits to the use of isolation units as a technique for avoiding exclusion, but also concerns that any effect on pupils' behaviour patterns is short term.

- There is no evidence of success for the 'boot camp' type of behaviour interventions.

Curriculum:

- There is no consensus on what the constituent parts of an appropriate alternative curriculum should be, with some suggesting that the initial focus of providers should be learning behaviours for many young people, and others arguing for an emphasis on the academic and/or vocational from the outset.

- Most of the literature supports a curriculum that encompasses core skills, including maths and English, along with a vocational offer encompassing work placements, although some authors caution that not all young people in AP want to follow a vocational programme. There is some disquiet that pupils in AP can sometimes be offered a somewhat utilitarian curriculum and their marginalisation can be reinforced through denying them access to a broad and rich curriculum.

- Although later studies are picking up an increased focus on the achievement of meaningful vocational qualifications and of maths and English GCSEs, there is still

some evidence that pupils are being taught at a level of challenge that is below their capabilities and are being offered vocational options that do not support post-16 transitions.

- There is some evidence that curricula which provide opportunities for engagement with the wider community are beneficial and motivating for pupils. There is more limited evidence for the benefits of complementary programmes incorporating physical activities.

Pedagogy:

- There is a consensus in the literature that the most successful AP programmes provide a smaller environment than mainstream schooling with a lower student–teacher ratio.

- The formation of strong relationships between teachers and pupils underpin effective pedagogies in AP.

- The literature on pedagogy in AP highlights the importance of small group instruction and individual attention, tailoring lessons to individual needs, and a facilitative and supportive teaching style.

Supporting progression to college or employment:

- Several studies highlight the importance of developing clear transition pathways and transitional support for pupils as they move out of AP.

- It is important to forge links between AP and local colleges and employers in order to assist pupils make the post-16 transition to less rigidly structured environments.

- High quality, targeted careers advice is especially important in the case of pupils who come from families experiencing intergenerational unemployment and poverty.

Skills of staff:

- AP requires a wide range of specialist staff who are well trained, caring and knowledgeable

- Having quality staff was seen as the key to providing a quality provision. There was wide recognition of the importance of attracting and keeping quality staff.

- High quality alternative education providers are strongly committed to their staff and support professional development but there are few opportunities for staff in different AP settings to share expertise and experiences.

- Concerns have been expressed about whether there is sufficient advanced

training in special needs education in England.

Quality of facilities:

- Effective alternative learning programs take place in clean and well-maintained buildings that are attractive and inviting and that foster emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety.

- In assessing the quality and suitability of facilities available for AP it is important to take into account the needs of specific learners and groups of learners; however this issue has attracted relatively little attention in the literature.

Schools developing their own AP:

- An increasing number of schools are developing in-house AP provision with a view to being able to better meet the needs of pupils, thereby reducing the need to send pupils off site.

- In-school AP includes a variety of approaches to preventing disengagement, including internal isolation arrangements, 'afternoon schools', employer involvement, alternative curricula and careers guidance. These approaches are often integrated in order to meet the specific needs of individual pupils.

- In house provision is generally regarded as improving attainment and engagement by the end of Key Stage 4 and facilitating progression to post-16 education and employment.

- Early identification of need (in Year 9) is an important feature of preventative approaches to supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET, and that interventions should begin as soon as signs of difficulty emerge.

Evidence gaps

There is a lack of evidence on whether and how transitional pathways and programmes contribute to effective post-16 transitions. This is because research in this area:

- Relies on anecdotal evidence or, at best, very basic data and analysis, which does not provide robust evidence in relation to the additionally of the pathways and programmes (or specific aspects of them).

- Does not include longitudinal studies that track different groups of students in order to establish whether (and why) they have been successful or unsuccessful in their post-16 options

There was also surprisingly little research available on effective pedagogy for working with particular groups of pupils in AP, especially in relation to gender and ethnicity.

Further research on evaluating attainment and progression is required in order to identify tools that can be used to ascertain the effectiveness of AP and related interventions.

Background

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 (Alternative Provision Statutory guidance for local authorities. DfE January 2013)

Historically, Local Authorities (LAs) have maintained Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) to cater for those students temporarily or permanently excluded or at risk of exclusion. Changes are currently underway in England. Pupil Referral Units, previously under Local Authority control, have often become academies, either stand-alone or as part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Others have newly opened as Free Schools. Pupils may be registered solely with the PRU or be dual registered, attending both their mainstream school and the PRU on a part-time basis. Additionally, there is a broad range of other AP on offer, provided by independent schools, further education colleges, charities and businesses. AP may be therapeutic in nature, for example for children with severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), mental or physical health issues (including hospital schools), or it may offer vocational learning. It is possible for students to be enrolled at a school, to be attending a PRU, either for a fixed period or part-time, and for that PRU, in turn, to arrange for the pupil to attend a specialist AP provider for some of the time.

There has been a range of concerns expressed about the efficacy of these arrangements in England (Centre for Social Justice 2011; Gazeley et al 2013; Ofsted 2011; Taylor 2012), Wales (Estyn 2007; Welsh Assembly Government 2013) and Scotland (PINS Scotland 2012). In particular, the arrangements sometimes lack coherence, with pupils missing out on vital aspects of learning such as the core skills of English and maths and a sufficiently broad and challenging curriculum. Reports also noted a lack of support for reintegration into mainstream school or progression to further education, training or employment. Pupils in 2014 who ended KS4 in alternative provision make up 1% of all KS4 pupils but 4% of all NEET (not in education, employment or training)16 year olds (Department for Education. Destinations of key stage 4 and key stage 5 pupils: 2014). This suggests that there are significant challenges in achieving successful transitions to participating in post-16 education or training.

In 2011, Ofsted published a survey about schools' use of off-site alternative provision other than PRUs. The DfE commissioned a further survey, which began in September 2012 and ended in July 2015. This second report noted improvements since 2011 but also drew attention to concerns that included pupils' academic outcomes. The survey showed that some pupils were still missing out on English and mathematics teaching at school on the days when they attended their alternative provision and that some timetables were too narrowly focused. In addition, pupils were not always sufficiently

challenged and so achieved at a lower level than they were capable of, limiting their options post-16.

A recent pilot programme trialled schools moving from commissioners of some alternative services to taking a much more active role in ensuring that all young people on their roll benefitted from effective provision, even where some of that might take place off-site and through a range of providers. The evaluation of the trial (Institute of Education and NFER, 2013, 2014) demonstrated that schools were keen both to take control of the commissioning process and to develop bespoke in-school provision for young people at risk of disengagement or exclusion.

The Educational Excellence Everywhere White Paper (March 2016) set out the Government's commitment to reforming alternative provision (AP) in order to deliver better outcomes and better value for taxpayers. This includes reducing the proportion of young people who become NEET. Accountability arrangements will change so that a pupil's mainstream school will retain accountability for their educational outcomes and will take a lead role in commissioning their provision, including those who have been permanently excluded. Schools will also have responsibility for the budgets from which AP is funded. The White Paper also proposed an innovation fund to test new approaches to support pupils who move directly from AP to post-16 education, exploring opportunities for social impact bonds and other innovative funding models.

Research Objectives

The Department for Education commissioned this literature review to explore the evidence for effective strategies that support young people to increase attainment and to make a successful transition to post-16 provision. This includes reporting on any differential effects by pupil characteristics, including gender, ethnicity and special educational needs and disability (SEND).

The literature review will be used to inform decisions on how to make best use of the AP Innovation Fund, ensuring good value for money by targeting resources at the approaches and methods that have the most potential for success.

The review focuses on the following themes:

- what is effective in supporting progression from AP to post-16 participation;
- what practices have been shown to be ineffective and for which groups of young people; and
- where the evidence is most secure/most limited.

It should be noted at this point that a number of changes have taken place in recent years which have yet to be reflected in the literature to any great degree. In particular, the raising of the participation age requires young people to continue in some form of education or training immediately following KS4, which was not the case at the time of the primary research that underpins much of the literature. In addition, the literature often makes reference to credit-based learning in which young people can accumulate units leading to a qualification in different settings and in their own time. The closure of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) has led to the gradual withdrawal of such qualifications. Similarly, reforms to vocational qualifications for 14 to 19 year-olds following the Wolf Report (2011) have meant that awarding organisations are redeveloping their qualifications to ensure that they offer genuine progression to further learning and/or employment, answering some of the concerns expressed in the literature. Although it is possible for schools and other providers to continue to offer qualifications that are not recognised in school performance tables, the changes outlined above make it likely that many such qualifications will not be available in the future.

Methodology

Search protocol

We began by developing a clear understanding of the policy background and context of the Literature Review. This included gathering information from policy leads at the DfE and published Government information.

The definition of alternative provision we used is as follows: “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” (Alternative Provision Statutory guidance for local authorities. DfE January 2013). All types of alternative provision were included in the review.

The protocol detailed the procedures to be followed including: the search terms/keywords; the locations/sources searched; the screens each study passed through for inclusion in the review; and the processes used for recording and storing references and summarising literature. This ensured consistency and transparency in the execution of the review.

Evidence was gathered through online searches and reference searches. Using the agreed protocol, we searched a wide range of online databases and websites, which offer electronic access to most published literature.

Online bibliographic databases:

- ERIC
- ISI Web of knowledge
- Education Research Abstracts Online
- British Education Index
- BERA Abstracts
- Australian Education Index
- JSTOR
- Scopus
- Google Scholar
- The Directory of Open Access Journals
- ProQuest
- Ingenta Connect

- EBSCO
- ZETOC
- WorldCat
- Social Science Research Network
- OpenGrey

Journals (accessed via publisher websites and library databases for relevant articles), including:

- British Educational Research Journal
- Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
- International Journal of Inclusive education
- British Educational Research Journal
- Review of Educational Research
- Educational Research Review
- British Journal of Special Education
- Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs
- Journal of Further and Higher Education
- Cambridge Journal of Education
- Pastoral Care in Education: An International Journal of Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- British Journal of Sociology of Education
- British Journal of Educational Studies
- Gender and Education
- Educational Psychology in Practice
- International Journal of Educational Management,
- School Psychology International
- Scottish Educational Review
- Urban Education

We also undertook a web search for relevant reports and looked at the websites of specific organisations including Ofsted, where we reviewed relevant thematic reports and inspection reports for evidence of successful or less successful approaches in regulated provision. Twenty inspection reports dating from the beginning of 2014 onwards were reviewed for examples of effective and ineffective practice related to the research themes. Other websites included OECD (for international comparisons), Estyn, HMIE,

DfE/BIS, awarding organisations and provider websites. However, only research reports were included in the review.

The list of search terms and phrases was updated as the review progressed and additions were recorded and used by both reviewers. The searches were limited to studies published in English language.

The following search terms were combined (e.g. with “OR” or “AND) and/or with different countries/geographical regions, universities and disciplines:

- Pupil referral units
- Alternative provision
- Alternative education
- Curriculum
- Effectiveness
- Attainment
- Key stage 4
- Transitions
- Post-16
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Special educational needs
- Disability
- Disaffected pupils/students
- Socio-economically disadvantaged
- Emotional/behavioural difficulties
- Exclusions/expulsions/suspensions
- Off-site provision/education

We supplemented the search through searching the reference section of particularly relevant pieces to identify other pertinent articles. Resources such as Google Scholar allowed a forward search to find relevant, cited articles.

Study Selection

Once studies had been identified, they were assessed for eligibility against the following inclusion criteria (using a two-stage approach to reviewing the title and abstract and full text):

- published in 2006 or later;
- involved pupils educated using a form of Alternative Provision; and
- included strategies, approaches or models that support effective transition to post-16 education or training and/or attainment at Key Stage 4 (or international equivalent). This also included relevant information from post-16 providers such as support given to vulnerable pupils that has proved effective in re-engaging them in education or training.

Manuscripts were retrieved for those that met the inclusion criteria following review of the full text on screen. Details of articles not meeting the inclusion criteria were set aside and saved, but not deleted. For excluded studies, we recorded what the practical reasons were for their non-consideration.

Once all potentially eligible articles had been collected, the next step was to examine the articles more closely to assess their quality. This was done to ensure that the best available evidence was used in the review. Particular attention was paid to information obtained from websites, which, while published on the web, have often not passed any sort of quality standards checks. (NB: Editorials, newspaper articles and other forms of popular media were excluded).

85 documents were included in the review (26 peer reviewed journal articles, 39 research reports and 20 Ofsted inspection reports). Most of the international literature derives from studies conducted in Australia and the United States.

Findings

Monitoring the quality and impact of AP, including on attainment and progression

Section findings

- Relatively few AP programmes are rigorously evaluated and monitored by schools and AP providers.
- AP staff are generally keen on possibilities of evaluation and tracking young people after they leave programmes but find it difficult to find the time and resources to collect and analyse anything but the most basic data.
- Some providers collect basic data on pupils following transition into post-16 learning, or employment. Although this data does not evidence additionality (the extent to which positive pupil outcomes happen as a result of AP and would not have occurred in the absence of AP), it does indicate whether or not a programme is contributing to the achievement of positive post-16 transitions.
- More work is needed to examine the effectiveness and reliability of tools to measure the outcomes of AP.

Quality alternative education providers have evaluation and planning cycles and regularly review and reflect on how they can improve their practice (Thompson and Pennacchia 2015). Good quality assurance means commissioners have the right information when they decide which provision is appropriate for individual pupils (Taylor 2012). Evaluating and monitoring the quality and impact of AP is therefore key in relation to both KS4 attainment and post-16 transitions.

Kendall et al (2007) highlight the importance of monitoring and evaluation techniques and list the following key elements:

1. Using key measures to demonstrate outcomes. LAs need to agree key measures by which they assess the effectiveness of AP and then ensure that relevant data are collected, analysed and acted on.

2. Systems for ongoing monitoring. Regular monitoring by (or on behalf of) commissioners, ensures that provision meets the minimum standard required and is consistent across AP providers. Findings from such monitoring can then be used to inform practice.

3. Stakeholder feedback. The views of key stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation of AP are important. In addition, they should also be used to inform the future

development of AP. Using client opinion to inform practice can also help increase stakeholders' engagement with – and commitment to – AP.

4. Cost-effectiveness. To ensure value for money, commissioners need to consider the quality of AP provided, the outcomes achieved, and the efficient use of resources (Kendall et al 2007).

However, while the importance of evaluation and monitoring is widely recognised, there is evidence to suggest that relatively few AP programmes are rigorously evaluated and monitored by schools and AP providers (e.g. Ofsted 2016; Thompson 2014; Thompson and Pennacchia 2015; Taylor 2012). Taylor (2012), who was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education to examine alternative provision and pupil referral units in England, concluded that:

> "In some areas there is little or no quality assurance of the AP available and there is only patchy checking undertaken by schools and LAs of the AP they have purchased. (…) Ofsted (2011) were particularly concerned about the variable nature of evaluation practices and the lack of information available to schools about the 'track record' of alternative education providers".

Ofsted's (2016) survey of alternative provision used by schools reported a similar situation:

> "Too few schools evaluated properly the quality of teaching and learning that their pupils were receiving at the alternative provision. Less than a third of the schools visited carried out any systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning at the placements they were using, either individually or in conjunction with the local authority or partnership" (Ofsted 2016).

There are at least two reasons for the variability in the use and rigour of evaluation and monitoring of AP in general and the progression of pupils after AP in particular. First, as Thompson and Pennacchia (2015) observe, national and international researchers have found that alternative providers are not always good at stating their programme goals, their expectations for students, and how these will be monitored and measured (e.g. Aron 2006; Gutherson et al 2011; Thomson & Russell 2009; White et al 2012). The research base for understanding what works and for whom in alternative education is thus evolving. There are few scientifically based, rigorous evaluations establishing what program components lead to various positive outcomes for pupils (Aron 2006; Gutherson et al 2011; Thompson 2014; Thompson and Pennacchia 2015). Gutherson et al's (2011) review of the international literature on Alternative Education Provision found that, while the literature included documents that presented what are *believed* to be effective characteristics and components of alternative education programmes, there was "'little rigorous evaluation research documenting the effectiveness of alternative education programmes that can link *specific* programme characteristics with *specific* student outcomes". Our review indicates that little has changed and that this remains the case.

But, as Thompson and Pennacchia (2015) emphasise, a solution to the monitoring and evaluation problem is not simple. Because alternative programmes have a wide range of educational, social, cultural, therapeutic and vocational offers and expectations, it is not a straightforward matter to design an evaluative framework that allows for difference as well as for common issues. Gutherson et al (2011) are of the same opinion and conclude that more work is needed to examine the effectiveness of tools to measure the outcomes of AP. Despite this, as Thompson and Pennacchia (2015) point out, in many US school districts and in some Australian locations, programmes that do not contribute to a common database cannot be funded and/or commissioned.

The second reason for the lack of rigorous evaluations of AP programmes is discussed by Thomson and Russell (2007). They found that AP staff are generally keen on the possibilities of evaluation and tracking young people after they left their programmes but found it difficult to find the time to collect and analyse anything but the most basic data and had no resources to do this kind of longitudinal work. With that said, it is worth noting that there are examples in the literature of schools and providers tracking pupils using relatively simple methods, which allow them to record where the pupils go when they leave AP and related interventions, having completed year 11. For example, IoE and NFER (2014) quote a provider who did this:

> "We track where the pupils go when they leave our provision. This year 89 per cent left with a college or training placement – half a dozen or more are going on to sixth form colleges. Last year retention was far better than in the past". (e.f. see IoE 2014).

While this data alone does not evidence the additionality of AP (the extent to which positive pupil outcomes happen as a result of AP and would not have occurred in the absence of AP), it does provide an indication of whether or not the programme is contributing to the achievement of positive post-16 transitions (Cowans and Burges 2009).

Understanding Pupils' Needs

Section findings

- Referral to AP should be on the basis of a comprehensive assessment of the pupil's needs and aspirations, with input from the pupil and his/her parents or carers, to ensure that the selected provision is a good match.
- For most young people, especially those with complex issues, provision is likely to be an individualised package often involving more than one provider as even pupils with similar socio-economic backgrounds or with SEND can vary enormously in their needs.
- Providers need to conduct their own assessment of pupils' needs as part of a 'fresh start' approach, and that assessment should include consideration of wider needs as well as those related to learning.
- Assessment should include understanding pupils' aspirations for post-16 to ensure that the academic and/or vocational offer supports their progression.
- Within AP, teachers need to be able to adapt programmes and tasks to the individual needs and learning styles of pupils. This approach is more successful than those which require the pupil to adapt to the programme.

Commissioning and referral

A number of studies highlight the importance of undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the pupil to ensure that the AP chosen is able to meet their individual needs (Abdelnoor 2007; Centre for Social Justice 2011; Kendall 2007; Ofsted 2016). Most studies suggest that the assessment of need should include background information on the pupil; strategies that had been used and their effectiveness; behaviours; academic ability; and aptitudes and interests, including career aspirations. However, alternative education providers may have concerns about referrals that both identify problems and propose solutions as this reduces the possibility of a 'fresh start' (Thomson and Pennacchia 2015). In this latter study (involving a literature review, key stakeholder interviews and 17 AP case studies) students were critical of the way labels can stick in mainstream schools which 'never forget', and 'drag things up from the past'. However, the authors say, providing a fresh start can go hand in hand with an awareness of previous difficulties and successes.

A large number of studies support the contention that a 'one-size fits all' approach to commissioning alternative provision is ineffective and that the package of support chosen should reflect the particular needs and aspirations of the young person (Martin and White 2012; Kettlewell et al 2012; Gazeley et al 2013; Evans 2010). The literature also suggests that, even where pupils share some characteristics, they benefit from a personalised package of support. In a study exploring the ways in which young people with SEN access and engage in alternative provision, Martin and White (2012) concluded

that effective commissioning involving a combination of elements is particularly effective for pupils with SEN.

The literature also points to the importance of involving young people and their families in referral decisions, something which does not always happen. Kilpatrick et al (2007) found that many of the 318 young people interviewed as part of research into AP in Northern Ireland had little understanding of why they had been placed in AP and had been provided with little or no information before beginning their placement. Thomson and Pennacchia (2015) observed that young people and their families often feel powerless in, and alienated from, the processes that are used to manage referrals, transfers and monitoring progress. The most thorough referral processes involved young people being visited at their existing school or invited in for a meeting, accompanied by a parent/career and, possibly, another advocate (Thomson and Pennacchia 2015). Taylor (2012) argued that "the best commissioning of AP aims to provide individual children with a bespoke, well-planned intervention" and that, where possible, this should be with the agreement of the parents.

In a literature review, Thomson and Pennacchia (2015) raised concerns that some groups of young people – working class girls, Traveller/Gypsy/Roma pupils and Black Caribbean young people – are disproportionately more likely to drift away from school or be excluded, yet are under-represented within alternative provision. They question whether this reflects a deficiency within the referral process, negative perceptions by young people of what is on offer, or issues to do with the operation of providers and services. The review of a sample of Ofsted inspection reports of PRUs found that in all except one in each case, the schools had more male than female pupils and a greater number than the national average of pupils classed as White British. What happens to disengaged young people in the groups above is an area requiring further investigation.

Within Alternative Provision

Many researchers (Martin and White 2012; Cowen and Burges 2009; Centre for Social Justice 2011) found that providers conducted their own assessment of pupils needs and capabilities, even where background information had been provided as part of the referral process, enabling them to tailor provision appropriately. Individual Educational Plans provide opportunities to build in successes, which improve pupils' self-esteem (Gallagher 2011) although Abdelnoor (2007) warns that providers should resist the temptation of making these too similar to those in mainstream schools. Instead, they should address the wider needs of the child rather than just their academic needs.

The literature also points to the necessity for providers to be willing to be flexible and to tailor their offer according to the needs of the pupil (McCluskey et al 2015; Gallagher 2011; Bielby et al 2012; Connor 2006). This was emphasised too in a study of effective alternative education programs by Quinn and Poirier (2006) who found successful provision was one where the philosophy emphasised the need for the educational

approach to be adapted to accommodate the student's learning needs, rather than one which sought to change the young person to fit the approach chosen. However, in the final report on the back on track alternative provision pilots, White et al (2012) reflected on the inherent tension between a personalised approach tailored to meeting the varying needs of individual young people and the imperative for providers to meet academic-related performance targets. Even in settings that cater predominantly for pupils with particular characteristics, studies suggest that providers need to be willing to be flexible:

1. In a provider working with pupils of whom a high proportion were of black Caribbean or mixed heritage backgrounds, staff were aware of the need to use a wide range of methods and strategies to engage young people (Evans 2010).

2. Young people with mental illness can experience a long-term barrier to participation in education or employment, not only from the illness itself but also from the associated stigma. Mental health workers counter this by exploring what each person is good at and then building upon their strengths and interests (Evans et al 2009).

3. Martin and White (2012) view successful alternative provision for young people with SEN as one which focuses on the individual needs and interests of pupils and their achievement of realistic and meaningful outcomes.

4. Michael and Frederickson (2013), in an exploration of the perspectives of 16 pupils with Social, Emotional or Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) in two inner London PRUs, found that pupils identified the failure to individualise programmes to their needs and interests as a barrier to successful outcomes.

5. Looked-After Children (LAC) may be out of education for a considerable amount of time, are often in crisis and, as a consequence, need a lot of extra support. Pivotal to successful provision in these circumstances is effective assessment and identification of need (IoE and NfER 2014).

Ensuring that pupils with AP are able to benefit from an individualised programme from a menu of possibilities is effective only if that menu includes options that reflect their needs and aspirations (Connor 2006; Kettlewell et al, 2012; Bielby 2012). Russell and Thomson (2011) suggest that this may not always be the case for girls in AP. They found that girls were typically offered vocational courses on stereotypical gendered lines (hair and beauty, childminding) because "the young people were assumed to need things to do with their hands not their heads" (page 297). Where girls might actually want a more academically focussed programme, this was often not on offer. Kilpatrick et al (2007) also noted that vocational learning in AP in Northern Ireland was offered according to gender stereotypes and requests for alternative qualifications were often refused. The researchers reported that outcomes for boys two years after leaving AP were better than those for girls and recommended that this be investigated further.

Communication and Partnerships

Section findings

- Involving parents and carers in a positive way can help counter negative perceptions of alternative provision and enable them to provide better support to their son or daughter which, in turn, can lead to improved outcomes.
- Partnership approaches with mainstream schools support successful reintegration as well as having the potential for the two types of schools to learn from each other.
- Partnerships with colleges and employers improve the chances of young people continuing to participate in education and training and this can include APs providing support post transition.

Parents and carers

Parents are recognised as having a key role to play in children's learning and, within AP, should be involved at all stages. Encouraging family members to provide support to pupils can lead to improved social and academic outcomes (Nelson and O'Donnell 2013; Michael and Frederickson 2013). Thomson and Pennacchia (2015) found that parents and carers welcomed positive exchanges with the school and that effective alternative providers found creative ways of engaging parents such as inviting them to participate in specialist sessions alongside their children.

In a study of four interventions aimed at understanding and preventing school exclusions, Evans (2010) cited one in which the involvement of parents and carers was central to the provider's method. Parents had often had negative experiences of school themselves and were unsure how to help their son or daughter. The provider made sure to keep lines of communication with parents open, while respecting the confidentiality of pupils. To build up parents' confidence, workers helped them to arrange clubs and community groups in the school holidays. At another project, working mostly with pupils with a black Caribbean heritage, a six-weekly review meeting is held with pupils, their parents or carers, their mainstream school and, where, appropriate, other services such as the police or social services (Evans 2010).

In the evaluation of the back on track alternative provision pilots, White et al (2012) reported on the value of those pilots which developed and maintained links with families and communities. This proved a useful way of countering negative perceptions of alternative provision through highlighting the quality and relevance of the programmes.

Partnership working

A number of reports stressed the importance of maintaining links between alternative providers and mainstream schools (Kendall et al 2007; IoE and NfER 2014) to improve

the chances of successful reintegration. In two case studies involving partnerships between mainstream schools and AP providers, Pennacchia and Thomson (2016) found examples of partnership working that demonstrated how complementary APs could contribute to positive change in mainstream schools and so have an impact beyond that of improving the behaviour of a small group of young people. The authors hoped that the case studies could provide an alternative to what they term as the traditional "repair and return" model of AP. In the evaluation of the School Exclusion Trials (IoE and NfER 2014), an important feature was the continued support pupils received from project staff even after they had been reintegrated into mainstream schools; this was seen as a key element in helping pupils remain engaged and in improving their academic performance.

Kendall et al (2007) saw the formation of networks of providers and agencies acting as a forum for information sharing, exchanging good practice and setting standards of provision as facilitating a more cohesive AP offer in a locality. Positive links between providers also help widen opportunities for pupils whose needs may not be fully met by a single provider. In addition, established links between providers and other services such as Connexions, CAMHS and counselling support can help ensure pupils can access appropriate additional support.

Two studies from the United States of America (de Velasco et al 2008; Aron 2006) found that particularly effective alternative schools created strong partnerships with local community colleges and employers to provide students with post-secondary options for either continued study or employment and training.

Two studies (Evans 2010; IoE and NfER 2014) suggested that a positive impact on transition and retention at post-16 was to be had through AP staff providing support for attendance at tests, appointments or interviews. This was followed, in both cases, by staff maintaining their links with pupils in their early days at college which could include liaising with the counsellor there.

Positive Relationships

Section findings

- Positive relationships with staff in AP settings are not just the foundation of positive learning experiences, but constitute important social learning in their own right. Mastering the ability to develop respectful adult relationships is necessary for successful progression into further education or employment.
- Relationships with trusted support workers that continue beyond the placement in AP can help young people to make positive transitions post-16 when their engagement can be fragile.

Many research studies report that pupils respond positively when they feel that staff in AP treat them with respect (Kendall et al 2007; Martin and White 2012). According to the literature, disengaged pupils in AP value a facilitative and supportive approach from staff in which trusting and caring relationships are established (Quinn et al 2006; Metzger 2007; Quinn and Poirier 2006; Michael and Frederickson 2013). Michael and Frederickson (2013) report that the most commonly identified enabler of positive outcomes, both academic and social-emotional, in PRUs is positive relationships between young people and their teachers. Effective relationships are also built on encouraging and inspiring young people, fostering their self-belief which may, on occasion, involve challenging their perceptions about their limitations and ability to succeed. This is especially the case in young people with SEN or physical disabilities (Martin and White 2012).

A sense of staff in AP having a fundamentally different type of relationship with pupils than in mainstream schools occurs frequently in the literature (Evans et al 2009; Connor 2006; Allen-Hardy,2009; Mills et al 2016, Centre for Social Justice 2011). This is in part due to much higher staff ratios allowing for a more individual approach but also because "with vulnerable and disaffected young people, a youth work approach to learning can be more effective than classroom methods" (Evans 2010). For many young people, the themes of listening and support, combined with a non-judgemental attitude, were very strong in AP (McCluskey et al 2015).

O'Gorman et al (2016) stress the importance of alternative provision providing a 'sanctuary.' "Schools were sanctuaries when they offered physical, emotional and psychological safe spaces; fostered a sense a community; enabled students to affirm their racial/ethnic pride and employed flexible behavioural supports"(page 541). Alternative schools which provided such sanctuary increased student engagement.

The developing of positive relationships in AP is not just a means to an end – the necessary foundation of learning – but an important social learning in its own right. Developing attachments (which can continue after pupils have left the provision) can be part of the healing process and enable young people to develop a sense of identity

(Thomson and Pennacchia 2014). While it is not the role of teachers in AP to replace or substitute for primary relationships in pupils' lives, which can be chaotic and complex, the care and support they give can enhance young people's capacity to sustain engagement in schooling (Mills et al 2016). Mastering the ability to form respectful relationships is necessary for progression into further education or employment. Establishing appropriate boundaries is important, however (Evans et al 2009; Allen-Hardy 2009).

Relationships with adults other than teaching staff can be important too; Kettlewell et al (2012) noted that an employer spoke with passion about the ability that he and a few of his staff had to relate to students in the workplace. In a case study of the London Boxing Academy (LBA) (Centre for Social Justice 2011), part of its success was seen to be in the strength of its adult role models who were usually an amateur or professional boxer. Boxing is used as a tool "to capture the imagination of pupils facing exclusion" and its disciplines enable students to learn teamwork and the acceptance of authority. In 2011, 90% of LBA students went on to training, apprenticeships or further education (Centre for Social Justice 2011).

In a review of school exclusion and transition into adulthood in African-Caribbean communities, Wright et al (2005) found a number of approaches being used including advocacy, mentoring and support groups; all, however, had their foundations in mutual respect, trust and responsibility. Workers shared with young people and their families their understanding of the damaging effects of discriminatory stereotypes that they had experienced from teachers and helped them to overcome exclusion. "This was achieved in a variety of ways, which included recognising immediate and longer-term effects of school exclusion, sharing understandings of the exclusion experience, providing alternative learning sites and assisting in improving family relationships, positive identity formation and reintegration into mainstream education" (page 59).

Leeds Reach is alternative provision that works predominantly with black Caribbean and mixed heritage children that was a case study in a report for Bernardo's (Evans 2010). Many of the young people attending had experienced multiple exclusions, including from other forms of alternative provision. A key aspect of the work at Leeds Reach was to help them relate respectfully to other adults and their peers. Many students built up strong relationships with the adults who strived to create a homely atmosphere in which students and staff sit round the table together for meals; as the manager explained "we take sitting round a table for granted, but many of them don't get that at home. And it's useful. We hear a lot!" (page 36). Many young people continued to contact the project for support during their post-16 transitions and, at the time of the review, one of the workers was developing a peer mentoring group for ex-Reach users aged 17 and 18.

Autonomy and Choice

Section findings

- Allowing young people a degree of autonomy and choice in their learning and environment helps them to participate in the building of a community with a shared purpose and positive social relationships, securing their engagement.

- Being given appropriate choices enhances the capacity of young people to act independently and make better choices, enabling them to 'become someone different'.

Kendall et al (2007) found that involving pupils in determining the content of their learning led to improved outcomes. Martin and White (2012), in a review of AP for pupils with SEN, argue that young people's views should be of prime consideration, with staff and parents/carers supporting aspirations while being realistic and honest. Evans et al (2009) found that it was possible in small-scale settings to allow pupils a degree of autonomy that would be impossible in large classrooms. For example, young people really appreciated relatively trivial aspects of AP such as not having to ask permission to go to the toilet and responded well to the 'respect' they felt this showed them. Research involving five alternative schools in Australia for young people unlikely to return to mainstream schooling (McGregor and Mills 2012) found that involvement in decision-making, not having uniforms and being able to call the adults by their first names helped to create an environment where students felt like equal partners in the teacher–learner relationship (page 859). They suggest that this gives rise to a sense of common purpose between staff and students in the building of a community which, in turn, helps secure the engagement of young people.

For Thomson and Pennacchia (2015), young people having a say in their own learning builds the capacity to act independently and make better choices "through an offer to be and become someone different." While the extent to which young people had a choice in their learning was variable, Thomson and Pennacchia noted that:

> "Alternative providers had a strong sense of the young person's right to choose, and while acknowledging the expectations and sanctions that might be accrued if the young person chose not to participate, they still built into their programmes regular occasions when they could talk about the choice to attend. They also offered choices in activities where feasible, and focused on choice-making as a process to be consciously undertaken" (page 25).

Within the London Boxing Academy, discipline is strictly enforced but it is seen as critical that, at the start of each year, pupils are involved in establishing the rules (Centre for Social Justice 2011). Similarly O'Gorman et al (2016) found that students benefit from an opportunity to explain transgressions and negotiate agreements with staff regarding consequences.

Behaviour Management

Section findings

- Many AP settings use a mixture of rewards and sanctions to manage behaviour, with clarity of the rules and their consistent application being seen as supporting positive outcomes.
- There are concerns that, while behaviourist techniques (which emphasise the importance of teaching pupils how to behave appropriately through positive reinforcement and the use of sanctions) are effective in the short-term, more therapeutic interventions may be needed to help students develop the self-management skills they need to make successful transitions into work or further education.
- There are some reported benefits for the use of isolation units as a technique for avoiding exclusion, but also concerns that any effect on pupils' behaviour patterns is short term.
- There is no evidence of success for the 'boot camp' type of behaviour interventions.

Many studies (Smith and Thomson 2014; Michaels and Frederickson 2013; Gallagher 2011; Hallam et al 2010) note the use of rewards and sanctions in AP. Positive reinforcement can come through incremental academic achievement and more immediate rewards such as earned field trips, games of football or attendance at events. Possible sanctions for poor behaviour noted in the literature included a reduced onsite timetable and restricted participation in extracurricular activities. Consistency, fair treatment and clear boundaries and consequences were identified as supporting positive outcomes by young people although Michaels and Frederickson (2013) noted that an overly authoritarian approach often led to conflict between pupils and staff and so was counter-productive. Gallagher (2011), in a case study of a secondary alternative provision centre based in Belfast, Northern Ireland, found that staff see understanding and respecting rules as an important life skill.

Thomson and Pennacchia (2016) observe that externalised discipline models with immediate rewards and sanctions are a move away from the pastoral approaches of a few years ago. They suggest that this change might be in response to the inspection regime and the need to provide 'hard data' of levels of infractions and successes, something not so easily demonstrated in a therapeutic approach. They suggest that possible consequences of the approach, although longitudinal data to test this is not yet available, include:

- students are not taught how to self-manage in less rigidly structured settings; and

- they do not practise exercising the kinds of initiative expected in workplaces and in higher and further education. (page 633)

The risk that, although they may respond positively to an individualistic, person-centred approach and effective behaviour management strategies while they are in AP, this does not necessarily equip young people with the tools and strategies they need after leaving provision is one picked up by Farouk:

> "Because of the high level of support they often lack the self-organisation and self-motivation to become independent learners who are able to make a successful transition into post-16 education. In addition, the confidence they gained as learners in alternative provision is often fragile so that they may not possess the resilience to manage by themselves in an adult learning environment" (page 7).

This concern is echoed by Barker et al (2010) in a study drawing on research in a mainstream London secondary school which found that, while the use of an isolation unit could result in significant changes in behaviour, such effects were temporary and students reverted to their normal behaviour once back in the classroom. More substantive ongoing support and interventions were needed to keep students at risk of disengaging in school focused (page 384). However, some young people are positive about isolation units, particularly where they see them as an internal arrangement that does not go 'on the record' and so affect post-16 opportunities (Gazeley et al 2013). However,

Similarly, in a review of AP in Virginia (Allen-Hardy 2009), it was noted that a boot camp approach to behaviour management was tried and discontinued because of its lack of effectiveness. Students were unsuccessful in transitioning out of the programme with a high level of incidents of disruptive behaviour in their follow-up placements, suggesting the programme did not provide the tools needed for self-regulation of behaviour. This finding was supported by a meta-analysis of 32 research studies (Wilson et al 2008) quoted in Gutherson et al (2011) who concluded that: "Boot camps, 'Scared Straight' and other 'juvenile awareness' programmes are shown to be ineffective and may actually lead to more offending behaviour."

In contrast, an off-site intervention programme designed for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion has developed a curriculum based on humanistic psychology, transactional analysis and neuro-linguistic programming (IoE and NfER 2014). Tracking of pupils who had completed year 11 showed that none had left school or been classified as NEET. According to a staff member:

> "'We teach them to understand and take control of their behaviour and that then supports how they see and deal with other things, like attendance and attainment. Pupils, take responsibility for their own behaviour, stop blaming everyone else and take control back, raise their aspirations and goals in life." (page 87)

Curriculum

Section findings

- There is no consensus on what the constituent parts of an appropriate alternative curriculum should be, with some suggesting that the initial focus of providers should be learning behaviours for many young people, with others arguing for an emphasis on the academic and/or vocational from the outset.
- Most of the literature supports a curriculum that include core skills, including maths and English, along with a vocational offer involving work placements, although some authors caution that not all young people in AP want to follow a vocational programme. There is some disquiet that pupils in AP can sometimes be offered a somewhat utilitarian curriculum and their marginalisation can be reinforced through denying them access to a broad and rich curriculum.
- Although later studies are picking up an increased focus on meaningful vocational qualifications and on the achievement of maths and English GCSEs, there is still some evidence that pupils are being taught at a level of challenge that is below their capabilities and are being offered vocational options that do not support post-16 transitions.
- There is some evidence that curricula which provide opportunities for engagement with the wider community are beneficial and motivating for pupils. There is more limited evidence for the benefits of complementary programmes incorporating physical activities.

Curriculum changes

In the past few years, the government has instituted a wide programme of educational reforms with structural control and accountability moving increasingly from local authorities to schools, as well as instigating changes to the content of the curriculum and qualifications available to 14 to 19 year-olds. In addition, the participation age has been raised to 18. GCSEs are being reformed to make them more rigorous and students are now beginning courses in some newly reformed GCSE subjects. Since the Wolf Report in 2011, the DfE has been engaged in the reform of vocational qualifications for 14 to 19 year-olds. Awarding organisations are now well down the road of redeveloping their qualifications to meet the new requirements for qualifications to be recognised in school performance tables. Qualifications for 14 to 16 year-olds, termed Technical Awards, must include synoptic[1] and external forms of assessment, be graded, offer only limited

[1] The Technical Guidance for Technical Awards (DfE 2015) defines synoptic assessment as: "*A form of assessment which requires a candidate to demonstrate that s/he can identify and use effectively, in an integrated way, an appropriate selection of skills, techniques, concepts, theories, and knowledge from across the whole vocational area, which are relevant to a key task.*"

opportunities for re-sits and provide evidence that they support progression to further education or training.

Many of these reforms took place after the publication of much of the literature we reviewed for this report, but some later studies have begun to reflect the beginnings of these changes.

The Curriculum in alternative provision

Martin and White (2012) see vocational learning which enhances young people's practical skills and knowledge as being particularly suitable for young people with SEN, arguing that this prepares them well for post-16 progression. Their case studies suggested that alternative providers typically tended to offer qualifications that allow students to achieve units of accreditation over time and, potentially, in different settings, which eventually build into qualifications and which are assessed through the production of evidence rather than examination. This approach is seen as more manageable for young people with SEN and particularly useful for young people who find it difficult to stay in a particular provision for a significant period of time. Bielby et al (2012) also advocate AP providers offering qualifications with practical and unit-based assessments that provide opportunities for incremental progress and which are flexible in terms of start and completion dates. In Queensland, Australia, alternative curricula are also primarily directed towards learning about work and learning for work (Connor 2006) and, as with pre-Wolf vocational learning in England, based on the achievement of units of competence.

As a result of the vocational qualification reforms, many qualifications of the type referred to above are gradually disappearing from the Register of Regulated Qualifications, in particular those qualifications that allow learners to build up a portfolio of units over time, eventually leading to a qualification. Gazeley et al (2013) found that some staff interviewed observed that they were no longer able to offer some of the vocational qualifications that motivated and engaged young people as they no longer counted in the school's performance data.

Most AP providers at KS4 offer a mix of academic learning, vocational qualifications, work experience and personal and social development (McCrone and Bamford 2016; Cowan and Burges 2009). In general, reviewers describe the curriculum in alternative provision as being one which is distinct from that in mainstream schools with, in particular, a more practical and applied focus. In this way, the curriculum should be relevant to future work (Aron 2006; Bielby et al 2012; Nelson and O'Donnell 2013). Bielby et al (2012), Evans (2010) and Nelson and O'Donnell (2013) recommend providing young people with a wide choice of subjects and courses to suit their interests and learning style and which provide opportunities to develop personal, social and employability skills. Finding the right course is seen as critical to keeping young people engaged and motivated. Evans (2009) found that young people attending vocational

training services post-16 had had varied experiences at school, with many leaving with few GCSEs. While many had felt bored and alienated at school, they were ready to apply themselves to courses which involved more practical learning and a clear relevance to future employment.

Vocational programmes of learning can have a positive impact on young people's image of themselves as learners. Skill Force is a Ministry of Defence sponsored project which offers a key skills based alternative curriculum at KS4 to hard-to-reach young people. In a study of pupils' perceptions of the programme (Hallam et al 2007), an important component was that all students attained a first aid qualification soon after beginning the course. For some students this was the first formal educational success that they had achieved. "It was clear that these students wanted to engage with what they described as 'the real world' and that they perceived the Skill Force curriculum more relevant in this respect" (page 60).

The literature also points to the value of employer involvement in vocational learning in AP. In research aiming to examine the impact of interventions to support students aged 14 to16 in mainstream schools at risk of disengaging from education and thus vulnerable to becoming NEET, Kettlewell et al (2012) found that curriculum-based approaches all had an element of employer involvement, for instance through extended work placements.Bruin and Ohna (2013) found that alternative courses with extended workplace practice can provide a nurturing environment for the development of new identities with regard to being able to learn (page 1104).

Some researchers (Kilpatrick et al 2007; Thomson and Russell 2007) have found problems with the currency of the vocational qualifications studied with prospective employers either not understanding or not valuing those on offer. There are indications that this situation may be improving as the IoE and NfER (2014) observed that the vocational reform programme has had the positive effect of LAs and schools paying more attention to the value of the qualifications that young people achieve.

A concern raised in a number of studies (Kilpatrick et al 2007; Thomson and Russell 2007; Russell and Thomson 2011; Thomson and Pennacchia 2014) is the extent to which providers offer vocational learning along strictly gendered lines. Thomson and Russell (2007) reported concerns about the effects on girls of programmes designed for and dominated by boys. Thomson and Pennacchia (2014) found that, in some cases, girls were encouraged to follow stereotypical courses such as hair and beauty with the accompanying assumption that boys wanted hands-on training related to manual trades. Kilpatrick et al (2007) in a study in Northern Ireland, reported that data suggests boys were less likely to be NEET two years after leaving AP and speculated that teenage pregnancy might provide at least some of the explanation for this. Further research is needed to explore whether girls are disadvantaged in comparison with boys in AP, the reasons for this and any long term impact on post-16 progression.

However, assumptions that pupils in AP are invariably best-served by a vocational curriculum are questioned in some of the literature. Michael and Frederickson (2013), in a study of the perspectives of pupils with SEBD on their experiences in PRUs argue that a relevant and engaging curriculum varies according to the pupil. Some are engaged through a curriculum that prepares them for their chosen career, whereas others require support that focuses more on their emotional and behavioural needs. Abdelnoor (2007) argues that some pupils are not in a position to benefit from a structured framework of learning and would be better served by provision focusing on personal and social development ahead of reintegration or supported learning post-school. Menzies and Baars (2015) and Kilpatrick et al (2007) report a tendency for alternative providers to focus more on engagement than on educational value, leading to a lack of challenge in the curriculum.

In Queensland, Australia, alternative curricula are also primarily directed towards learning about work and learning for work (Connor 2006) and, as with pre-Wolf vocational learning in England, based on the achievement of units of competence. Students generally respond well to what they see as 'practical, hands on and world related' learning but the report expressed concerns that work-related learning in Year 10 brings significant social and pedagogical challenges and not all young people are 'work-ready' at that age. A Director of a Technical and Further Education commented that:

> "Learning in school should be about engagement, rather than a preparation for work. Learning at school age should be focused on Literacy, Numeracy, Social Skills, PE/Health, IT and Creative arts. It should be activity-based, creative and give a context for learning skills. Yet we persist with schooling models that produce illiterate, innumerate and antisocial young people." (TAFE Director, page 20)

There is also concern that a curriculum that is too heavily focused on vocational learning (some of which is not highly valued) means that young people are not necessarily provided with opportunities to achieve academically. Mills et al (2016) found that alternative settings often focused almost exclusively on literacy, numeracy and vocational options. They acknowledge that such skills are necessary for economic participation but also contend that an impoverished curriculum can reinforce marginalisation and disadvantage even if young people move into employment. Taylor (2012) also found that some AP and PRUs place insufficient emphasis on academic attainment with the result that children leave school at sixteen without a good grounding in core curriculum subjects and reduced chances of succeeding in college or getting a job. Young people themselves have reported that they would have liked the opportunity to have studied for a greater number of GCSEs (Kilpatrick et al 2007).Young people want qualifications that are meaningful and have a positive impact on their post-16 opportunities and they are acutely aware of which ones have a lesser valuee than GCSEs (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014). Encouragingly, in the evaluation of school exclusion trials, the IoE and NfER (2014) found that most schools and PRUs were attempting to find a balance between

helping pupils achieve GCSEs in core subjects and providing a wider curriculum offer designed to keep them engaged. Head teachers in the trials reported far fewer pupils ending KS4 with no qualifications than previously and a large fall in the number becoming NEET.

Thomson and Pennacchia (2016) found that the inclusion of vocational courses, 'life skills' and outdoor activities in the AP curriculum inevitably led to other subjects being removed to make room:

> "Almost without exception, it was Languages (seen as too difficult and alienating) and Social Sciences (seen as not valued by employers or by the young people) that were removed. Art, and occasionally Drama, remained. This was justified on the grounds that young people would not be able to achieve in more formal curriculum areas." (pages 631-632).

However, the authors argue that topics in social sciences can be very relevant to the lives of young people:

> "We encountered a strong commitment in all sites to the importance of the basics and work-related subjects, despite the patchy progress of pupils. But equity-related educational notions – of a common curriculum or the right to all areas of knowledge or that social sciences, humanities and languages are crucial ways of making sense of your world and your self – were largely absent" (page 633).

It can be seen, therefore, that there is no clear consensus on the ideal curriculum that APs should offer other than it needs to be engaging, creative, flexible, relevant, contain an appropriate mix of academic and vocational learning opportunities and support progression. Thomson and Pennacchia (2015) concluded, following a literature review:

> "that the question of achieving the educational entitlement of students in alternative education is vexed. It is not as simple as requiring particular standards to be met. Re-engaging those who are seriously disenchanted with learning and with formal education systems and meeting their health and welfare needs, as well – and at the same time – as supporting them to achieve the kinds of educational qualifications that matter, is a far from straightforward task" (page 25).

Maths and English

The available literature suggests that many AP providers (Martin and White, 2012; McCrone and Bamford, 2016) look to integrate numeracy and literacy with other practical and vocational learning and this is often through delivering functional skills rather than GCSEs. Providers believe that this improves engagement as pupils can see the relevance to their future career and understand that maths and English qualifications are required for most post-16 options (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). For Taylor (2012),

the focus on key skills should never slip for children in AP: “For these pupils literacy and numeracy become more important not less.”

Some researchers commented that the pressure on schools to ensure pupils achieve GCSEs in maths and English exerted through school performance tables can negatively impact on their willingness to reintegrate students from AP in KS4 (Gazeley et al 2013; Centre for Social Justice 2011). This makes it imperative that those pupils for whom GCSEs are appropriate have access to these qualifications through AP, although there are concerns that insufficient staff in AP have the necessary skills to teach at this level (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014). However, the changes set out in the 2016 White Paper, Educational Excellence Everywhere, will make schools accountable for the results of pupils even where they remain in AP. In the evaluation of school exclusion trials, the IoE and NfER (2014) found an increased focus on GCSE attainment, particularly in English and maths, for those in PRUs and AP, with PRUs increasing the amount of the timetable given over to GCSE study.

The extended curriculum

Part-time alternative provision is often complementary to the programme offered by schools or PRUs. The focus of provision may be vocational, creative or therapeutic (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014). In their evaluation of the back on track alternative provision pilots, White et al (2012) and Estyn (2007) cite numerous combinations of academic, vocational, therapeutic, social, emotional, personal and behavioural curriculum content delivered by a range of providers with pupils attending on a part-time basis. Examples of complementary provision include support for anxious non-attenders of school; farm work through a charitable trust; and substance misuse projects. However, Pennacchia and Thomson (2016) found that there are reportedly occasions where young people are attending only the complementary provisions and are not being given access to the kind of broad and balanced curriculum that would improve their future prospects for training, education and employment.

Some researchers have provided examples of the benefits of young people engaging in programmes that develop transferable skills and foster community engagement. McCrone and Bamford (2016) reported on the outcomes of a programme which incorporated a Social Enterprise Qualification (SEQ). Eight of the ten young people following the programme, who had been identified as at high risk of becoming NEET, were engaged in learning in the December after completion of their GCSEs. The success of the programme was believed to be attributable to the social, communication and transferable skills they had developed and an increased ability to see the relevance of their school work to the outside world. The programme required young people to complete a relevant local project, engendering enhanced community awareness and developing team-working skills.

Similarly, a study of participation in youth leadership programmes by at-risk students in

the Midwest, USA, (Metzger, 2007) found that

> "Students appeared to benefit most from Leadership experiences that entailed active, hands-on, real-life, and project-based learning. It was also important to have immediate and direct application of their learning" (page 147).

> "The opportunity and ability to have an impact on their community or world was a resounding theme in this study. It was the most frequently-referenced theme in participants' responses. Students felt like they had the capacity to act upon their world and to make constructive contributions" (page 161).

The wider benefits of physical activity programmes are less certain in the literature. In a paper providing an overview of some of the literature relating to the areas of young people, physical activity and disaffection, Holroyd and Armour (2003) found conflicting opinions about the success of such programs and a corresponding lack of systematic research. However, they tentatively conclude that "programs including an element of physical activity can facilitate the pro-social development of disaffected young people." This can be particularly successful when a programme involves a relatively small group who have had input into its design. This uncertainty about the claims that can be made about the impact of physical activity programmes is echoed in a literature review by Sandford et al (2006):

> "The conclusion to this discussion is that sport and physical activities may well be the catalyst for change in the lives of disaffected young people, but there is no watertight guarantee that this will happen in a consistent or uniform way" (page 266).

Pedagogy

Section findings

- There is a consensus in the literature that the most successful AP programmes provide a smaller environment than mainstream schooling with a lower student–teacher ratio.
- The formation of strong relationships between teachers and pupils underpin effective pedagogies in AP.
- The literature on pedagogy in AP highlights the importance of small group instruction and individual attention, tailoring lessons to individual needs, and a facilitative and supportive teaching style.

Introduction

Attainment and successful transitions at the end of Year 11 depend upon the use of effective pedagogical strategies (e.g. Mills et al 2016; Hayes 2012). This is a challenge faced by teachers in both alternative and mainstream settings (Mills et al 2016); however, the challenge faced by the former requires the use of distinctive pedagogical approaches designed to cater for and avoid repeating or reinforcing pupils' prior experiences of failure (Hayes 2012). The literature on pedagogical approaches in AP highlights the importance of small group instruction and individual attention, tailoring lessons to individual needs, and style(s) of teaching.

Small group instruction and individual attention

There is a consensus in the national and international literature that the most successful AP programmes provide a smaller environment than mainstream schools with a lower student–teacher ratio (Smith and Thompson 2014). Smaller class sizes make the classroom more manageable for teachers (D'Angelo et al 2009) and allow teachers to provide pupils with more individual attention (Lehr and Lange 2003; D'Angelo et al 2009; Centre for Social Justice 2011); match the learning style of the pupils (Lehr and Lange 2003); tailor learning programmes and projects to the students' needs and interests (McGregor et al 2015; Lehr and Lange 2003); and promote the development of trusting relationships (Lehr and Lange 2003). This is highlighted in research on: interventions to support students aged 14-16 who are at risk of temporary disconnection from learning in mainstream schools in England (Kettlewell et al 2012); alternative provision for 11- to 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland (Gallagher 2011); programmes for young people aged 13 to 20 who were or had recently been NEET (Evans et al 2009); and young people aged 12-16 with SEBD who are attending PRUs (Michael and Frederickson 2013). Prior studies have also reported an association between smaller groups and improved concentration

and behaviour in class for young people with SEBD (Harriss, Barlow, and Moli 2008; Jahnukainen 2001; Sellman 2009).

Tailoring lessons to individual needs

The literature on AP for young people aged 12-16 indicates that successful programmes use individualised methods of instruction, and individual assistance (Smith and Thompson 2014; McGregor et al 2015), both of which are facilitated by low teacher-pupil ratios. The basic principle common to successful alternative education programmes is the understanding that not all students have the same goals or the same ways of learning:

> "By allowing students to work at their own pace and move on to new material once a concept has been mastered, students are able to stay focused and learn more than in classrooms where instruction is not taught at the appropriate pace for the student and thus he or she becomes disengaged" (Smith and Thompson 2014, page 117).

In a study of young people aged 12-16 with SEBD who were attending PRUs in London, Michael and Frederickson (2013) found that the young people identified failure to individualise tasks appropriately to pupil needs and Interests as a barrier to the achievement of positive outcomes. This adds support to previous research in which young people with SEBD attributed poor academic and behavioural outcomes to a curriculum which was irrelevant to them or which was not matched to their ability (Hamill and Boyd 2002; Jahnukainen 2001; Polat and Farrell 2002).

In some AP programmes individual learning plans are drawn up for each pupil based on their needs and capabilities in order to enable teachers to tailor their teaching to the needs of individual pupils and to monitor improvement (Gallagher 2011; McGregor et al 2015). Aron (2006) also discussed the importance of pupils having personalised learning plans and set learning goals based on their individual plans in his research into AP in the US.

Teaching style

According the literature, disengaged pupils in AP value a facilitative and supportive approach to teaching based on a positive emotional connection between themselves and their teachers (Quinn et al 2006; Metzger 2007; McGregor and Martin 2012). McGregor and Martin (2012) report that within each of the AP sites they studied in Australia, many young people commented on the effectiveness of teaching strategies that they described as 'conversational' and suggested that the relationship with teachers was a key factor in their enthusiastic engagement with curricula, which were 'real life', 'hands on' and 'connected'. The young people also suggested that the quality of their relationships with teachers had been compromised in their mainstream schooling experiences. Thus, whilst the teachers at the sites sought to make the curricula relevant to the young people's

lifeworlds, they also worked on developing a positive emotional connection between themselves and the pupils.

This is consistent with the findings of Metzger's (2007) study of 'at-risk' high school youth who participated in leadership programs in alternative educational settings in the United States. Metzger (2007) found young people's most meaningful learning experiences consisted of a facilitative and supportive teaching style; active, applied, and real-life opportunities; new, varied and interesting activities; positive and influential role models; and long-term involvement. Pupils favoured a facilitative, supportive, and involved approach to teaching. Metzger found that the teacher role defined by pupils in the study was also reflected in a year-end teacher evaluation completed by students in the Leadership programs:

> "Twelve out of twelve students in the Leadership classes rated the following items as being very important or important in a person teaching leadership: believing in, respecting, and trusting students; students and teacher learn and work together; promoting teamwork and cooperation; recognizing and affirming students‟ talents and efforts; being organized and prepared; trustworthiness; and celebrated efforts and successes of the team. In addition, at least ten of the twelve students rated the following traits as very important or important: asking versus telling; being a positive role model; encouraging students' ideas and efforts; getting everyone's involvement; giving support; providing feedback; having reasonable expectations; and making learning interesting and fun" (page 148).

The findings of the studies by McGregor and Martin (2012) and Metzger (2007) chime with those of Quinn et al's (2006) research on alternative programmes in the USA. Quinn et al (2006) concluded that:

> "students identified as troubled or troubling tend to flourish in alternative learning environments where they believe that their teachers, staff and administrators care about and respect them, value their opinion, establish fair rules that they support, are flexible in trying to solve problems, and take a non-authoritarian approach to teaching" (page 16).

Catch-up arrangements

When pupils are involved in part-time AP there is a risk that they may fall behind with their studies in mainstream schools. Ofsted (2016) stated that formal catch-up arrangements should be in place in schools where pupils missed core provision through being in part-time AP. In the best examples, teachers and leaders provided high-quality catch-up arrangements. Some schools arranged for dedicated time set aside for pupils to receive help from mentors, teaching assistants or higher-level teaching assistants in the school's pastoral or learning support centres. This type of support was most effective where the class teacher liaised closely with the member of support staff in providing work for the pupil and assessing work done in catch-up.

However, McCrone and Bamford (2016) found that pupils may respond differently to one-to-one support. In one of the schools involved in their study, they found a mixed response to individual mentoring: while some young people may appreciate one-to-one attention, others may not like being singled out. One of the support programmes examined by McCrone and Bamford, which offered graduate volunteer mentors to state schools in disadvantaged areas, responded by developing ways to step back and allow the young people In Year 11 to come to them when ready. The young people reported that they enjoyed the extra help they received in class from the mentors.

Supporting progression to college or employment

Section findings

- Several studies highlight the importance of developing clear transition pathways and transitional support for pupils as they move out of AP.
- It is important to forge links between AP and local colleges and employers in order to assist pupils in post-16 transition to adapt to less rigidly structured environments.
- High quality targeted careers advice is especially important in the case of pupils who come from families experiencing intergenerational unemployment and poverty.

Transitional pathways and transitional support

The UK and international literature is unanimous in stressing the importance of developing clear transition pathways and offering effective transitional support for pupils as they move between alternative provision and continuing study at school, college, an apprenticeship (in the UK) or employment (Connor 2006; Gable et al 2006; Kilpatrick 2007; Cowen and Burges 2009; IoE and NFER 2014; Thompson and Pennacchia 2014; Ofsted 2016). Young people require support with all aspects of the post-16 transition process, including: making decisions about competing pathways and qualifications; acquiring the necessary accreditation; submitting applications; preparing for interviews; and learning the social skills and knowledge that would be necessary to be successful (IoE and NFER 2014; Thompson and Pennacchia 2014; Ofsted 2016). Additional support for young people when they move on to their post-16 options is also seen as an important, which can have a positive impact on the retention of young people in further education (IoE and NFER 2014). The UK literature includes examples of AP staff keeping in touch with young people when they first move on to their post-16 options (Thompson and Pennacchia 2014), staff going into college with young people for the first few days (IoE and NFER 2014), staff making links with a counsellor at an FE college (IoE and NFER 2014) and staff providing a support network throughout year 12 (Thompson and Pennacchia 2014).

There is evidence to suggest that transitional support from AP to post-16 options in England is not always effective (White et al 2012; Ofsted 2016). Ofsted (2016) report that the pathway between AP and continuing study at school, college, an apprenticeship or employment was unclear in 15% of the schools visited. Moreover, in the final report on their evaluation of the DfE's Back on Track pilot programme which involved 12 innovative pilot projects to develop best practice and encourage greater diversity in alternative provision, White el al (2012) found that an on-going issue for the pilots related to the difficulties in ensuring that core educational gains could be effectively transferred and sustained if, and when, young people re-integrate back into mainstream school

settings or progress to other destinations. As a result, they concluded that efforts needed to be made to ensure alternative provision is integrated into wider local systems and structures of service delivery:

> "The effectiveness of alternative provision is enhanced when it is perceived and commissioned as an essential component of a continuum of local provision and support, with coordinated routes in and out, to facilitate appropriate positive transitions for young people" (White et al 2012, page 126).

Links to colleges, employers and the wider community

Several studies in the UK, US and Australia emphasise the importance of developing transition support through links between alternative education programs and mainstream educational settings including employers and community organisations (e.g. Aron 2006; D'Angelo and Zemanick 2009; Fitzsimons, Hughes et al 2006; Gable et al 2006; Gallagher 2011; de Velasco et al 2008; McCrone and Bamford 2016). This is viewed as key in terms of supporting pupils' transitions from a more to a less restrictive environment when they leave AP (Fitzsimons, Hughes et al 2006; Gable et al 2006; Thompson and Pennacchia 2015).

Links to colleges include, for example, offering courses in conjunction with FE colleges, (Gallagher 2011), further education taster days (McCrone and Bamford 2016) and, as noted above, accompanying pupils on their first few days at college (Thompson and Pennacchia 2015). In a US study, de Velasco et al (2008) reported that:

> "Where we found strong continuation programs, we usually also found deliberate, well-designed partnerships with local community colleges. Teachers and counsellors in continuation schools worked with area community colleges to develop programs of study, opportunities for their students to visit the campus and sit in on classes; advisors from community colleges visited the continuation high school to tell students about the program, explain opportunities for financial aid and admissions procedures" (de Velasco et al 2008, page 11).

Targeted careers guidance

High quality targeted careers guidance is also highlighted as an important element of transitional support when pupils leave AP (Gallagher 2011; Bielby et al 2012; McCrone and Bamford 2016), especially in the case of pupils from deprived areas who can come from families experiencing intergenerational unemployment and poverty (Monteith and McLaughlin 2004). According to Gallagher (2011) careers guidance was crucial in the AP programme he studied as it helped identify:

- different categories of jobs and careers that interest the young people;
- hopes and expectations of the young person; and

- perceptions versus reality of the choices of the young person.

Skills of staff

Section findings

- AP requires a wide range of specialist staff who are well trained, caring and knowledgeable
- Having quality staff was seen as the key to providing a quality provision. There was wide recognition of the importance of attracting and keeping quality staff.
- High quality alternative education providers are strongly committed to their staff and support professional development but there are few opportunities for staff in different AP settings to share expertise and experiences.
- Concerns have been expressed about whether there is sufficient advanced training in special needs education in England.

The literature emphasises the importance of having staff that are committed and highly skilled. Staff should have a positive approach to behaviour management, encourage student participation in decision making, be well versed in holistic learning and teaching, and ensure that young people feel safe and secure (Thomson and Pennacchia 2014).

The provision of appropriate professional development opportunities for AP staff and for the sharing of good practice is viewed in the literature as key, as the young people attending AP often have complex needs that demand specialist skills and attributes (Aron 2006; Foley & Pang, 2006; Quinn & Poirier 2006; Kendall et al 2007; Martin and White 2012; Thomson and Pennacchia 2014). In their study of AP provision across the UK, Thomson and Pennacchia (2014) reported that the best AP providers in their sample paid for staff to undertake training to ensure that they had the necessary skills and expertise to support all students, including those with very particular needs, such as blind and deaf students and those with a range of learning difficulties. These providers also kept up-to-date with policy developments and read relevant research. In some cases, senior members of staff saw it as part of their role to read and synthesise the latest policy and research so that this was accessible to all staff.

Thompson and her co-researchers, Pennacchia and Russell, raise three concerns in relation the skills of staff and professional development in England:

- Thompson and Pennacchia (2014) expressed concerns about whether there is sufficient advanced training in special needs education in some sites. While most of the staff they saw in their study of AP across the UK had teaching, youth work or outdoor education qualifications and therapeutic providers had trained counsellors and psychologists, they saw very few people with formal special education qualifications, especially in England.

- Thomson and Pennacchia (2015) found that in some locations staff had limited knowledge of the norms of academic attainment in regular schools. However, they noted that a secondment model in Scotland and Northern Ireland is helping to tackle this issue. For example, in Scotland all teaching staff are under the LA umbrella. In North Lanarkshire teachers are regularly seconded from mainstream schools to work in alternative provisions for several years. They are seen as teachers with additional expertise and they share this when they return to the mainstream context. They also bring with them knowledge of the academic norms of regular schools, ensuring that standards and expectations remain equal between schools.

- Thomson and Russell (2007) reported that many small providers in particular find it very difficult to run and/or pay for staff professional development and that there were few opportunities for staff across programmes and providers to get together to share experience and expertise (see also, Thompson and Pennacchia 2015).

Quality of facilities

Section findings

- Effective alternative learning programs are in clean and well-maintained buildings that are attractive and inviting and that foster emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety.

- In assessing the quality and suitability of facilities available for AP it is important to take into account the needs of specific learners and groups of learners, however this issue has attracted relatively little attention in the literature.

AP is delivered in a wide variety of settings depending on the nature of provision (and the specific needs of a young person), including traditional classroom settings, practical and vocational settings, 'college style' environments, and work-based community or multi-purpose settings: for example, in garden centres, sports venues and clubs, and farms. Regardless of the type of setting, the ambience and environment of alternative provision is key. Delivery of provision in an attractive, high quality, clean and well-maintained physical environment helps to create a positive atmosphere, where young people feel comfortable, secure and valued, fostering emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety (Aron 2006; Kilpatrick 2007; Martin and White 2012; Ofsted 2016). It is also critical that learning environments do not present accessibility issues for those with physical disabilities (Martin and White 2012).

The importance of young people learning in an appropriate environment and the fact that a poor environment impedes performance has been demonstrated in both the UK and US (e.g. Kilpatrick et al 2007; Aron 2006). It is therefore of particular concern that Ofsted's (2016) recent survey of schools using AP providers found examples in which the facilities used for AP were not of such good quality:

> "Sometimes lacked a quiet space to complete tasks such as making notes or discussing their progress. Well-equipped and efficiently managed workshops sometimes existed alongside classrooms that did little to inspire or promote high standards. In some cases, classrooms at alternative providers had outdated computer equipment and poorly presented displays that did not match the high quality of the facilities found at the pupils' schools. At times, providers had been set up in neglected commercial premises. These facilities were often much better than the poor first impression gained from the outside. However, the external appearance and sometimes their locations at the backs of industrial estates could form an intimidating introduction for some pupils, parents and carers" (page 32).

In assessing the quality and suitability of facilities available for AP it is, of course, important to take into account the needs of specific learners and groups of learners. This issue has attracted relatively little attention in the literature; however the findings of research on pupils in AP with SEN indicates that, while their needs do not differ markedly

from general AP, the location of alternative provision can contribute to its success. Provision delivered in work-based community or multi-purpose settings, for example, in farms, garden centres and sports clubs, provides a contrast to the traditional school or PRU setting. (Martin and White 2012). Many learners respond well to the additional elements these environments offer, including the opportunity to learn outside, in large open spaces and engage with members of the public. However, for other young people with SEN, alternative provision works best when it is delivered in their regular learning environment as these are places that learners are familiar with and feel comfortable in. (Martin and White 2012)

Schools developing their own AP

Section findings

- An increasing number of schools are developing in-house AP provision with a view to being able to better meet the needs of pupils, thereby reducing the need to send pupils off site.
- In-school AP includes a variety of approaches to preventing disengagement, including internal isolation arrangements, 'afternoon schools', employer involvement, alternative curricula and careers guidance. These approaches are often integrated in order to meet the specific needs of individual pupils.
- In house provision is generally regarded as improving attainment and engagement by the end of Key Stage 4 and facilitating progression to post-16 education and employment.
- Early identification of need (in Year 9) is an important feature of preventative approaches to supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET, and interventions should begin as soon as signs of difficulty emerge.

There appears to be a growing trend for schools in England to develop their own in-house AP in order to reduce both fixed term and permanent exclusions in Key Stage 4 (Kettlewell et al 2012; Gazeley 2013; McCrone and Bamford 2016; Ofsted 2016). The alternatives to the use of specialist provision external to schools, such as Pupil Referral Units and placements with the Behaviour Support Service, include: internal isolation arrangements (Gazeley 2013); 'afternoon school' arrangements, whereby the young person attends in the afternoon and until after the end of the school day (Gazeley 2013); employer involvement (Kettlewell et al 2012); an alternative curriculum, for example, shifting from a largely academic subject offer to more flexible and personalised pathways that included a broader range of practical or vocational subjects (Kettlewell et al 2012; Ofsted 2016); specialist work-based learning facilities on site to accommodate a school-based alternative provision offer (Ofsted 2016); careers guidance (Kettlewell et al 2012); and mentoring and counselling (McCrone and Bamford 2016). Pupils taking part in these support programmes are often identified by their schools in Year 9 (or earlier) to be at risk of disengaging from education and needing additional support (Kettlewell et al 2012; McCrone and Bamford 2016).

Studies of the impact of in-school AP are broadly positive about their effectiveness, although it should be noted that these are based on relatively few interviews with relatively small numbers of pupils and staff. A small-scale, qualitative study of the use of isolation units and 'afternoon school' arrangements at two schools found that young people who were interviewed were positive about these alternative arrangements, commenting that they provided a second chance for the student to show that (s)he can work and do well; conveyed a recognition that everyone makes mistakes;

protected students future chances, as internal arrangements did not go on record or affect college opportunities; and, in the words of one student, offered “an opportunity to learn from your mistakes”. Staff at one of these schools indicated that this type of provision had also enabled young people to continue with their school work and complete GCSE examinations (Gazeley (2013).

Kettlewell et al’s (2012) research on the use and impact of in-school AP found that the majority of the AP in their study integrated two or more approaches to preventing disengagement, such as employer involvement, an alternative curriculum, mentoring and careers guidance. For example, the curriculum-based approaches, which tended to have relatively high staff to student ratio, all had an element of employer involvement, for instance through extended work placements. One of the mentoring programmes was both a specific strategy targeting vulnerable students’ self-esteem and an employer-related programme, as it exclusively used business contacts as mentors. In some cases, alternative curricula included courses which targeted personal characteristics that hindered engagement with formal education, such as lack of resilience, self-confidence or social skills. Information, advice and guidance (IAG) was a feature of all the programmes, in the sense that the programmes encouraged transition to employment. IAG was delivered to students through different combinations of discussions with experienced teaching staff and employers.

Kettlewell et al (2012) found that the support programmes resulted in a range of soft impacts including an improvement in students’ attitudes towards learning; increased confidence, self-esteem and motivation; raised aspirations and students feeling better informed about future career paths. Hard impacts for current students included improved attendance at school and increased achievement including literacy and numeracy. Hard impacts on students from previous years included increased progression into apprenticeships or further study (Kettlewell et al (2012).

McCrone and Bamford, (2016) also examined the perceived impact of a range of types of school-based AP for students in Key Stage 4. Although these AP programmes were different, there were key elements that appeared to be common to all approaches and contributed to their perceived success in terms of improvements in both attainment and engagement in learning by the end of Key Stage 4:

- Although practiced in diverse ways, by different adults, mentoring and counselling are clearly important to young people. It could be for some of these young people that a consistent relationship with a responsible adult enabled them to keep on track. However, for some young people if mentoring became too formal there was evidence to suggest that it might cease to be beneficial.
- Linked to the mentoring role was the presence of a member of staff (invariably the project lead) who was accessible, approachable and to whom the young people could relate. This was a time consuming role.

- The mutual interest and support from other similar young people appeared to enhance school engagement.
- The evidence suggests that when young people could relate to the world of work and the next steps of their journey they found it easier to understand the relevance of their school work.
- Young people reported that they liked having more control over their work and flexibility to see their project lead and/or mentor when they needed (McCrone and Bamford 2016).

Ofsted's (2016) reported that schools visited reported that that had begun to operate their own version of alterative provision on-site were able to demonstrate a number of benefits:

- By bringing the alterative curriculum in house, the quality of delivery and tracking of outcomes were subject to the school's own monitoring and evaluation arrangements. This enabled leaders to have greater quality control of provision and overcome discrepancies that they had sometimes encountered before between the quality of information offered by different off-site providers (Ofsted 2016).
- Some schools were also able to demonstrate how adjustments to their own curriculum and stronger focus on early intervention were reducing the need for off-site provision. For many of these schools, off-site provision was viewed as a 'last resort' for the few pupils whose needs could not be met by resources in school (Ofsted 2016).

Ofsted Inspection Reports

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting publicly funded schools including those offering full-time alternative provision to more than five pupils (or one or more looked-after pupils or with special educational needs). Alternative providers that offer only part-time education or full-time education to very small numbers of pupils do not have to be registered. The responsibility for ensuring the quality of provision in this case rests with the pupil's school – which in some cases may be a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), itself a form of alternative provision.

This section reviews a sample of inspection reports of regulated provision (PRUs). Twenty inspection reports of Pupil Referral Units conducted since January 2013 were reviewed for examples of what inspectors considered to be successful approaches and those practices viewed as less effective. The majority of reports (16) were of free schools and academies, while the remaining schools were maintained by local authorities. One was a hospital school; one, which also had part-time boarders, specialised in children with speech and communication difficulties; and one incorporated a unit for young mothers. Most schools had pupils who were dual-registered with a mainstream school and, in all except the provision for young mothers, the schools had more male than female pupils. Except for one school, all had a greater number than the national average of pupils classed as White British. In most, pupils spent a relatively short time within the PRU before being either reintegrated in their original school or moving to a new mainstream school. However, those in Year 11 often remained in the PRU until they had completed GCSEs or other qualifications.

Some, but not all schools, worked with other providers either in partnership (for example, local colleges or neighbouring schools) or by commissioning alternative provision; this enabled them to extend the range of curriculum subjects on offer and/or provide specialist support.

Scrutiny of the inspection reports did not identify strategies particularly successful with any category of pupils, with the exception of sensory provision for those with speech and communication difficulties, but did identify approaches that were successfully deployed in a number of PRUs. Many of the good and outstanding schools, inspectors noted, had been successful in helping most or all of their pupils move on to sixth form, college or apprenticeships after Key Stage 4. There was considerable similarity between schools in strategies and approaches seen as supporting pupils to make good progress at Key Stage 4 and a positive transition afterwards which included:

1. Ensuring the PRU has sufficient information about the student from the referring school on entry so that an individual plan can be developed along with continuing monitoring by the student's mainstream school are seen as crucial to successful outcomes. In one PRU, inspectors noted that effective monitoring by the headteacher of the virtual school and her advisers' communication with staff ensured that looked after children at risk of permanent exclusion were provided for at the academy.

2. Once provided with relevant information, effective PRUs establish a comprehensive analysis of each student's needs. This gives all staff the knowledge they need to manage students' behaviour and avoid triggering poor behaviour.

3. The use of key workers to support students' personal development and liaise with their parents or carers to share information about how well they are doing. Parents appreciate this support and benefit from being able to praise as well as understand how to help with their children's behaviour.

4. Where possible, students are taught and supported in whole-class lessons to avoid reinforcing their negative perceptions of themselves as learners, although in many PRUs, class groupings were very small (for example, eight students).

5. Consistency in approaches to managing inappropriate behaviour with students aware of sanctions and also any rewards for positive behaviour. For example, in one school students know that if they are late back to lessons after lunch they will have to pay back any missed time and complete any missed work by staying behind after other students have gone home.

6. Fixed term exclusions are used judiciously and are managed well – examples include requiring students to continue learning via a virtual learning environment and guidance offered to students and their family to avoid repeat exclusions.

7. Teachers have expertise in the subjects they are teaching. In addition, the emphasis on the training and professional development of teachers is singled out as a strength by inspectors in good and outstanding schools; examples given include training on managing challenging behaviour and autism

8. Positive relationships among students and between students and teachers enable students to feel confident to take risks and to make mistakes.

9. Teachers challenge students to develop skills in solving problems on their own, including through the use of questioning techniques.

10. There is a strong focus on supporting students to achieve essential literacy and mathematics qualifications.

11. High aspirations and an expectation that all students will enter for GCSEs, go on to college or university, or gain an apprenticeship, are shared by staff and students. As a result, students feel valued and try their best to succeed.

12. Students are offered vocational subjects which interest and engage them. Where extended opportunities are made available through external providers good schools ensure that these, are well matched to students' needs and the PRU checks the progress, attendance and behaviour of students attending external alternative provision rigorously.

13. The provision of high quality vocational facilities. For one PRU, these included hair and beauty salons, MOT-compliant garages, well-equipped construction facilities and commercial catering kitchens. Students reported that these facilities help them feel valued as learners and that they can achieve qualifications that will be useful in finding future careers.

14. Students are provided with careers advice which includes help in making choices about the wider subjects they study so that they meet the entry requirements for their future education, training and employment aspirations. This advice can come from careers advisers or business mentors.

15. Good and outstanding PRUs make effective use of external support. Examples include a psychologist who visits an academy weekly to work with students who require therapeutic and more intensive pastoral support and specialist groups providing advice and support in dealing with local gang cultures and addiction.

16. In AP based in a hospital, teaching is enhanced by high quality resources, including access to interactive screens and tablet computers, so that pupils are able to make good progress when they are confined to bed.

17. Links with partners such as a football club or performing arts can enliven the curriculum and improve students' confidence, motivation and resilience.

18. Inspectors commented favourably on the impact of students engaging with the wider community, for example through volunteering or raising money for charity and how this helped to re-engage disaffected learners.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of inspectors' comments on where schools needed to improve related to the above approaches not being followed or being implemented inconsistently. The most frequent areas for improvement raised in inspection reports were:

1. Delays in obtaining all the relevant information from referring schools meaning that some students start without the most effective provision in place for them.

2. On occasion pupils' individual targets are not written as clearly and sharply as they could be. Adults do not record enough detail about pupils' progress in lessons and this leads to less precise planning for subsequent sessions.

3. Learning in the core subjects of English and mathematics is weak because work is often either too easy for more-able pupils or too hard for lower attainers. This is because, in these cases, teachers are not taking enough account of assessment information to inform their planning.

4. Many pupils are reliant on teachers to help them and are less good at persevering and working things out for themselves. As a consequence, they are not becoming more resilient; they give up too quickly, sometimes before they have started.

Conclusions and Evidence Gaps

Conclusions

From the outset, providers need to conduct their own assessment of pupils' needs as part of a 'fresh start' approach and that assessment (and subsequent ones) should include understanding pupils' aspirations for post-16 learning and employment to ensure that the academic and/or vocational offer supports their progression. It is also important to ensure that that pupils are being taught at a level of challenge that is in line with their capabilities and that they being offered academic and vocational options that support post-16 transitions.

To enable pupils to make informed decisions (over time), providers should ensure that they are aware of the opportunities and pathways open to them and that pupils' aspirations are reviewed on a regular basis. Partnerships with colleges and employers are important in this regard and improve the chances of young people continuing to participate in education and training (and this can include APs providing support post transition). There is some evidence that curricula which provide opportunities for engagement with the wider community are beneficial and motivating for pupils and raise awareness of opportunities that are open to them. Links between AP and local colleges and employers also assists in preparing pupils for post-16 transition from more to less rigidly structured environments

It is necessary to develop bespoke transition pathways for progression into post-16 learning. This includes transitional support for pupils as they move out of AP to an FE college or other learning and working environment. Young people need support with all aspects of the post-16 transition process including career guidance, planning and decision making, applying for courses, interviews, acquiring the necessary qualifications, and understanding the social skills and knowledge that are necessary to be successful. High quality, targeted careers advice is especially important in the case of pupils who come from families experiencing intergenerational unemployment and poverty.

Young people also need support when they first move on to their post-16 options. This can range from accompanying them into college for the first few days to a support network throughout year 12. Relationships with trusted support workers that continue beyond the placement in AP can help young people to make positive transitions post-16 when their engagement can be fragile.

Providers should collect basic data on pupils following transition into post-16 learning (or employment). Although this data will not evidence the 'additionality' of programmes, it will give some indication of whether or not a programme is contributing to the achievement of positive post-16 transitions.

Evidence gaps

1. There is little research on the needs of specific groups of learners, especially in relation to gender and ethnicity; the main exception is research focused on pupils with SEN and, in particular, SEBD.

2. The UK literature is largely focused on white working class boys. Female, Afro-Caribbean and Roma pupils attract little, if any, attention. It is unclear to what extent this is a result of sampling issues or to low numbers of pupils belonging to these groups in AP.

3. The literature on AP is largely concerned with young people who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion (or disengagement) from mainstream education. As a result little is known about young people who are in AP because of reasons relating to their physical or mental health.

4. There is surprisingly little detailed research into pedagogy in AP. References to effective pedagogy refer to non-authoritarian, facilitative and supportive styles of teaching but do not elaborate on what this actually entails, and how this may differ in relation to different learners and in different situations.

5. While there are a number of studies that highlight the importance of transitional support and programmes, there is little or no systematic research that demonstrates how these pathways and programmes contribute to effective post-16 transitions and student retention in post-16 options in the longer term. The evidence is largely anecdotal or, at best, based on very basic data and analysis, which does not evidence the additionally of the programmes (or specific aspects of them). Moreover, there is limited evidence concerning what works well, or not so well, in relation to different groups of learners. There is a need for systematic longitudinal studies that track students in order to establish whether (and why) they have been successful or unsuccessful in their post-16 options.

6. Further research on evaluating attainment and progression is required in order to identify tools that can be used to ascertain the effectiveness of AP and related interventions.

7. Guidance is needed for AP providers in relation to how they should evaluate and monitor their programmes. This needs to take into account levels of experience and expertise in evaluation amongst staff and the limitations on time and resources.

8. The growth in the number of schools that are developing in-house AP provision also raises some important issues. It seems that schools are using a variety of approaches and some are trying to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Further research is needed to map the approaches being used and to develop an understanding of how they

are, in some cases, being integrated and tailored to meet the specific needs of individual pupils.

9. There is also the question of how the use of in-house AP may change the profile of pupils attending external AP either part- or full-time and how this affects the ‘dynamics’ of AP provision, the skills and expertise required by staff and the nature of post-16 transitions.

Many studies refer to small numbers of pupils. This makes it difficult to draw robust conclusions about what works well or not so well (and why).

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