

Alternative Provision

Ward(s): ALL

Portfolios: Education and Skills Councillor Statham

1. Aim

1.1 This report provides an update on Alternative Provision within Walsall LA.

2. Summary

2.1 This report provides an overview of what alternative provision (AP) is, current practice within AP, an overview of Walsall's quality assurance process and framework, and our future strategy with a focus on supporting our AP providers and young people within AP.

3. Report detail – Know

3.1 For the purposes of the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities January 2013, the definition of Alternative Provision 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.'

3.2 The Council has statutory duties to provide Alternative Education Provision for Walsall resident pupils of compulsory school age defined as the above.

3.3 Alternative Providers deliver a range of alternative approaches to providing access to education for young people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion, at risk of disengaging from mainstream school provision or otherwise require alternative education provision to meet their educational entitlement. It is crucial to provide a safe and supportive environment for these vulnerable children and young people to ensure good outcomes for them.

4. Processes and Procedures within Alternative Provision:

4.1 Each Alternative Provision has their own safeguarding policy and identified safeguarding staff within their provision, in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

4.2 The local authority employs a team of 4 AP Keyworkers and an AP Manager who are all Level 2 trained and form part of the safeguarding team for pupils in AP. This team supports the safeguarding team at the New Leaf Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or other Alternative Provision providers on our AP framework. The keyworkers' main role is to support the students in their AP setting(s). They work with KS4 students and providers to improve attendance and help resolve any issues to avoid a breakdown of placements.

4.3 Walsall has an AP procurement framework, which has recently reopened for new tenders. AP providers across the country can apply to go onto that framework, so that the LA can place students at that setting. The local authority commissions and undertakes up to 3 types of quality assurance (QA) audits via onsite visits, before students are placed at these settings. We commission QA visits for the standard of education being provided, to all providers and then on an annual basis. The LA also commissions health and safety and safeguarding audits for those providers that are not registered schools.

4.4 Walsall has two pupil referral units (PRUs), one behavioural (New Leaf) and one medical (Shepwell Centre). In addition to these PRU's, we commission a wide range of alternative provisions to meet the needs of our students and provide a good selection of qualifications for our pupils to access. We currently have 23 providers on the Alternative Provision Framework, which comprises of 6 registered independent schools and 17 unregistered providers. An example of an unregistered provider being 'Walsall Construction Training Ltd' where students enroll upon vocational gas, electrical or plumbing courses. An example of one of the registered independent schools on the framework is Sandwell Valley School, which is currently graded as outstanding by Ofsted in 2022.

4.5 With the new tender process now open, we hope to attract a larger number of AP providers to the framework, so that Walsall has a broad AP offer that can deliver wide range of courses, qualifications, and high-quality support to ensure good outcomes for our young people. All new providers applying to be part of Walsall's AP framework, are subject to quality questions and moderation throughout the procurement process and once on the framework will be part of the quality assurance processes.

4.6 Alternative provision can be set up by the public, voluntary and private sectors. There is no requirement for the majority of alternative providers to register with any official body and no formal national arrangements to evaluate their quality. Any provider of education should be registered as an independent school if it meets the DfE criteria – that it provides full-time education to five or more pupils of compulsory school age, or one such pupil who is looked-after or has an Education Health and Care Plan.

4.7 The unregistered providers Walsall's AP framework are subject to 3 annual audits to evaluate their suitability and quality. Only those providers that meet our QA criteria will have students placed at that setting. Registered schools that have a recent Ofsted inspection that satisfies our QA process, will receive annual visits to ensure the quality of education is suitable for our students. Where the QA process raises concerns, the

AP Manager/Quality Assurance Team Manager will work with the provider to remedy the situation. If this concern cannot be addressed or is of a serious nature, the LA will remove students from that setting and possibly remove/suspend the provider from the AP framework.

4.8 We currently have Walsall students at 6 registered providers and 13 unregistered provisions. We have 55 permanently excluded children in KS4 are placed in alternative providers for their education provision.

4.9 All Alternative Providers are encouraged to complete a Section 175 Audit to identify areas for development around safeguarding.

4.10 The AP Managers Meeting, held termly, has a safeguarding and pupil outcome focus and is a forum to share good practice across AP.

5. Walsall Context

5.1 The majority of the pupils within AP are male with identified vulnerabilities. Many of the cohort have identified SEND, with or without an EHC plan, or with SEMH needs and also many on free school meals and a number of children in care. There are pupils on child protection, child in need, early help plans, however most of the cohort are not open to social care services. Upon entering Alternative Provision, attendance can be low, however this improves quickly for the majority of pupils in KS4.

6. Walsall Alternative Provision Framework and Quality Assurance:

6.1 Walsall's Alternative Provision Framework and Quality Assurance Process aims to:

- Improve provider performance.
- Establish better collaboration between commissioners and Alternative Providers.
- Safeguard and promote the wellbeing of all children accessing education in the Alternative Provision (AP) sector.
- Ensure all learners receive consistently high- quality teaching and learning experiences and their statutory entitlement.
- Inspire confidence across Alternative Providers and support the culture of continual improvement within the AP sector.
- Raise the profile of Alternative Providers in Walsall.
- Enable recognition and sharing of good practice across schools, colleges and other providers.

6.2 The purpose of the framework is for commissioners of AP (Schools and the LA) to work closely with providers to fulfil the aims above. It is an Ofsted expectation that all commissioners of AP quality assure that provision to ensure it meets the needs of their young people. Where the LA has commissioned provision from its AP framework, the LA will undertake fully its QA processes prior to making a student placement. Where a school in Walsall has independently commissioned an AP placement for a student(s), then that school is responsible the quality of education and safeguarding of those students whilst attending that AP setting.

6.3 The local authority quality assurance audit describes the minimum standards expected of providers to be included in the framework, the Local Authority will undertake this element of the QA process when commissioning AP providers. There is an expectation that to be included within the directory Alternative Provision providers sign up to the QA process as described in this document.


6.4 The Safeguarding QA is currently completed by the Alternative Provision Manager and the Teaching and Learning QA is completed by Reflective Education, on behalf of the Local Authority.


The Quality Assurance Audit covers five themes as follows:

1. Safeguarding
2. Health and Safety
3. Admissions, Guidance and Support
4. Quality of Education
5. Outcomes for learners

6.5 QA Ratings

All self-evaluation and QA visits will use a standard RAG rating:

 RED – Requirement not met or significant deficiencies; urgent improvement needed.

 AMBER – Requirement partially met; processes to be enhanced or embedded.

 GREEN – Requirement fully met.

7. Safeguarding Quality Assurance Process:

7.1 Our current Quality Assurance (QA) process for AP includes annual inspections, performance reviews, and adherence to statutory requirements. This process also addresses safeguarding measures in AP settings through inspections, staff support, and monitoring of safeguarding policies and procedures. The process is a supportive one, allowing the setting and QA facilitator to identify areas of strength and weakness and implement an action plan for development.

Of the 23 providers on the current AP framework, only 1 provider is rated as RED and will not be considered as part of the student placement process. 24 providers have been QA this year so far.

7.2 Walsall QA process ensure that there are:

- **Frequent Inspections:** Annual audit to ensure ongoing compliance with safeguarding and quality teaching standards.
- **Comprehensive Training:** Mandatory, up-to-date safeguarding training for all

AP staff from the Local Authority.

- **Robust Data Analysis:** Effective data collection and analysis to identify trends and areas requiring improvement.
- **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** Strengthened partnerships between the Local Authority, AP providers, and external agencies.

7.3 We work with our AP settings to ensure they operate according to best practice and have made progress with ensuring that robust safeguarding procedures are followed within all of our AP providers. The audits have highlighted that Alternative Provisions have the following are in place at providers:

- Alternative Provisions have a named DSL.
- Staff in Alternative Provisions are accessing the relevant training to fulfil their safeguarding duties and keep children safe.
- WSPB guidance and agreed inter agency procedures are clearly referenced in their policies.
- Pupils in Alternative Provision know who the DSL is and how to report concerns.
- Alternative Provisions understand their duties and responsibilities to keep children safe from harm.
- Safer Recruitment processes are in place.
- Alternative Provisions have robust policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding.
- Staff know how to make referrals to social care and other external agencies.
- Alternative Provisions include safeguarding within their curriculum offer.
- Alternative Provisions know where to seek support and signposting around safeguarding.
- Alternative Provisions receive regular updates from the Safeguarding Coordinator-Education in Walsall.

7.4 We will be offering and signposting safeguarding training packages to our AP providers on the framework going forward. This will ensure that staff in settings have an up to date understanding of safeguarding issues and also for providers to meet all their safeguarding statutory requirements and support vulnerable learners.

8. Future Development

8.1 *A better understanding of the numbers and needs of Walsall pupils in Alternative Provision*

Walsall LA will be undertaking a data gathering exercise in conjunction with our schools to collect information on the numbers of students placed/attending alternative provision that have been commissioned directly by mainstream schools. Walsall LA will provide support to our schools to ensure they are commissioning their AP's safely and the students are progressing appropriately.

Nationally, Ofsted have raised some concerns about the appropriateness of some AP and a lack of oversight by schools of their students attending these settings. The LA's new procurement framework will be published on the councils [Local Offer website](#). This

will allow schools to be able to check on AP providers QA outcomes that they may be thinking of commission places directly with.

We will also be working with our schools and providing them with our audit checklist(s), so teachers in schools that are looking to commission AP places, have a process they can build on to ensure that the placements are safe and suitable for their students.

8.2 Supporting New Leaf Centre

The New Leaf Centre is a vital partner in our mission to provide quality Alternative Provision. They have demonstrated dedication to the well-being and development of the children and young people they serve. The local authorities AP Keyworker team work closely with the New Leaf Centre staff and provide additional capacity for the school in managing their safeguarding procedures. Along with other LA staff the teams work together to ensure that KS4 students 6-day entitlement is fulfilled. For permanent exclusions, the local authority must arrange suitable full-time education for the pupil to begin no later than the sixth school day of the exclusion.

8.3 12 Month Strategy to Support our Alternative Provisions

Moving forward, our strategy for supporting pupils within Alternative Provision will be to their unique needs and in line with all Alternative Provision guidance and legislation:

A. Support the SEN needs of students within AP: The AP Team will be collaborating closely with the providers and the Local Authority SEND Team to ensure the robust assessment of pupil's entering AP is completed and ongoing support is identified and monitored, to support progress and wellbeing.

B. Tailored Training Programs: Based on the findings from the safeguarding QA audits, we will support APs to design and implement tailored support plans for their settings. These programs will ensure that all staff receive signposting, support and appropriate training including specialised training related to their roles, through WSCP and external agency training.

C. Collaboration Enhancement: Effective collaboration with external agencies is vital for all AP settings. We will facilitate a closer working relationship between Alternative Provisions and relevant external agencies, such as social services, mental health professionals, and local authorities through partnership events. Regular Alternative Provision managers meetings and information-sharing protocols have been established and will continue next academic year to ensure the continuation of strong relationships with AP's and the staff in AP feel supported to provide the robust support systems for children and young people. Working with providers to identify additional resources or funding streams that they may be eligible to apply for.

D. Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation: Throughout our development, we will maintain a robust system of monitoring and evaluation. Regular progress reviews, feedback mechanisms, and data analysis will help ensure that our support to AP remains effective and responsive to the evolving needs of the children and young people they serve.

Continuous Improvement Culture: Through the Quality Assurance process, we aim to instill a culture of continuous improvement within the Alternative Provisions. This will

involve ongoing support, creation of support plans, training, evaluation of safeguarding processes, and a commitment to adapting to emerging best practices across the sector.

By focusing on these key areas and collaborating closely with the New Leaf Centre and the Alternative Provisions on our framework, we aim to enhance good practice in AP, ultimately providing a safer and more nurturing environment for the children and young people under their care. This strategic initiative aligns with our broader goal of ensuring the highest standards of safeguarding and quality education throughout our region's AP settings.

9. Conclusion:

In conclusion, Alternative Provision remains a focal area for our Local Authority. While we have made progress, there is room for continuous improvement, particularly in the areas of SEN support, training, collaboration with AP's and mainstream schools that commission AP. The next 12 months will see targeted efforts to support all pupils within AP and ensure good outcomes across all AP settings in our region to ensure pupil's get the right support, in the right place and at the right time.

10. Decide

10.1 The committee may decide to request further information on Alternative Provision.

11. Respond

11.1 Any recommendations made by the committee will be responded to by the appropriate service area.

12. Review

12.1 The actions and outcomes within this report are monitored by Access & Inclusion SMT and by individual schools.

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