



Briefing Paper: Dynamic Purchasing System for Alternative Provision

Kathryn Angelini

December 2023

Context:

The needs of most children and young people can be met through mainstream education provision, but a small proportion with the most complex needs require specialist support. This enables them to progress in their learning, going onto their next step towards a settled adulthood. Some children and young people however need education or training arranged outside a mainstream or specialist setting because otherwise they would not receive suitable education or training. This can be for a number of reasons:

- Children and young people who have been permanently excluded from their school.
- Children and young people who have medical and mental health needs preventing them from attending a school.
- Children and young people at risk of suspension, on a fixed period suspension, or directed by schools to off-site provision to support behavioural and emotional challenges.
- Young people aged 16 – 25 with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or other vulnerabilities needing additional support to progress to a settled adulthood.
- Children and young people unable to cope with a full-time curriculum, missing out on education, or who find themselves marginalised from mainstream schools because of behavioural or other challenges.

Services within Education utilise multiple providers to undertake the Council's statutory responsibility to provide education to all resident children and young people, which can include via an Alternative Provision if this is considered most appropriate to meet their needs.

The number of children requiring access to an Alternative Provision in Hillingdon fluctuates throughout the year. There are on average at any time approximately 100 children accessing Alternative Provision commissioned by the Council.

The majority of these places are commissioned by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team or the Exclusions and Reintegration team. In many cases this is because a mainstream or specialist setting cannot meet the child's current SEND needs, or they have been permanently excluded.

Some children's needs are being met in a group setting and others require 1-1 support. Hillingdon commissions from a range of providers, including Alternative Provision Free Schools, Further Education Colleges and Sixth Form Centres, Tuition Centres and Personal Tutors.

The demand for Alternative Provision is expected to increase over the coming years, in line with the expected growth in EHCPs. However, the additional specialist provision capacity that will be available in the Borough, and the work related to the Department for Education (DfE) safety valve programme are likely to mitigate any additional costs.

What is Alternative Provision?

The definition provided by the Department for Education (DfE) for Alternative Provision is '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'. This is the definition which Hillingdon adopts.

Alternative Provision can take many different forms, depending on the individual needs of the child. It is important the service commissioning the provision is clear on whether the provision is a registered school with a DfE number, or an unregistered setting as this will have considerations regarding how many hours a pupil can access the provision. In all cases, the provision should be both efficient in its delivery of education and suitable to the child's age, ability, and aptitude; and to any special educational needs they may have.

Before considering alternative provision for a child, the Council needs to ensure both the quality of education and the safety of pupils within a setting. The DfE describes good alternative provision as 'that which appropriately meets the needs of pupils and enables them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers. All pupils must receive a good education, regardless of their circumstances or the settings in which they find themselves.'

Provision will differ from pupil to pupil, but there are some common elements that alternative provision should aim to achieve, including:

- good academic attainment on par with mainstream schools, particularly in English, mathematics, and science (including IT), with appropriate accreditation and qualifications;
- specific personal, social, and academic needs of pupils are properly identified and met to help them to overcome any barriers to attainment; and
- improved pupil motivation and self-confidence, attendance, and engagement with education; and clearly defined objectives, including the next steps following the placement such as reintegration into mainstream education, further education, training or employment'.

Alternative provision should be good quality, registered where appropriate, and delivered by high quality staff with suitable training, experience, and safeguarding checks. It should have clearly defined objectives relating to personal and academic attainment. Where an intervention is part-time or temporary, to help minimise disruption to a pupil's education, it should complement and keep up with the pupil's current curriculum, timetable, and qualification route.

Plans moving forward:

Use of a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) will create a competitive environment for suppliers and ongoing assurance on value for money whilst also ensuring a breadth of provision will be available to best meet the needs of a diverse and fluid cohort of children and young people. There will be four Lots that Providers will be able to apply for:

- Lot 1: Full time education provision
- Lot 2: Part time education provision
- Lot 3: Bespoke provision
- Lot 4: Support for post-16 Education and Preparation for Adulthood

At the time of application, Providers will submit a Pricing Schedule for their range of services, which will be a maximum price for services, and will be used to award individual placements. Before an Alternative Provision placement award is successful, Providers may need to demonstrate they can meet the needs of the child or young person if further quality criteria are required from initial admission, that they have sufficient capacity, and the DPS call-off process is to the Providers who are the best value for money.

There will also be the ability to award contracts for a block of placements to Providers during the term of the DPS. The quality criteria will be set by the service area at the time of each block contract opportunity, and Providers will be able to submit a specific price for each opportunity and the successful Provider will be selected through a mini competition based on an evaluation process of 50% quality and 50% price.

The DPS allows for new entrants to join at any time, subject to them completing and passing the relevant qualification criteria. This ensures that there will be sufficient provision available to meet the needs of children and young people and will support high compliance standards. This also enables market development opportunities to keep up with changing demands pressure, and service development.