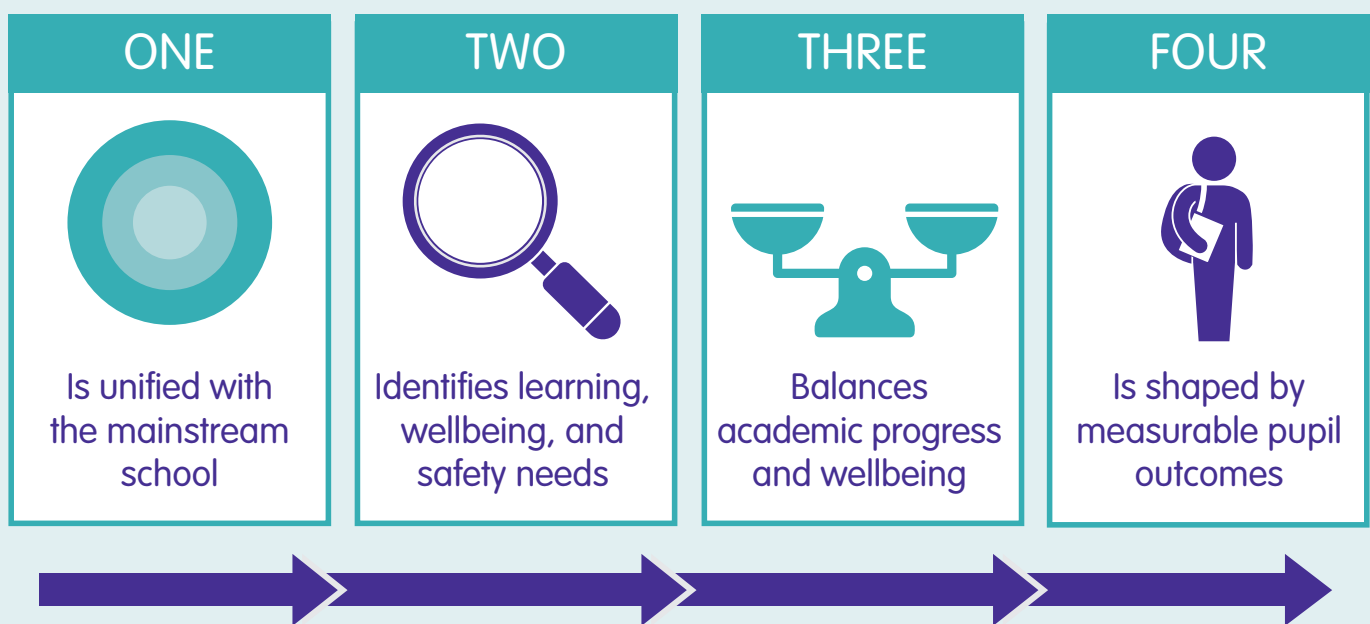


# The Difference



## What works: Four Tenets of Effective Internal Alternative Provision

Emma Simpson and Cristín O'Brien  
with Foreword by Jamie Rogers

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## The Difference

The Difference is the school leadership charity for whole school inclusion, committed to tackling the social injustice of lost learning.

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# Glossary

<b>Boxall Profile</b>	A tool which assesses the social, emotional and mental development of children and young people aged 4-18.
<b>Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)</b>	The person responsible for safeguarding and child protection in schools.
<b>Emotionally Based School Non Attendance (EBSNA)</b>	Emotionally Based School Non Attendance is a term used to describe the difficulty children and young people experience in attending school due to emotional reasons, such as stress, anxiety and/ or feeling overwhelmed. This can result in prolonged periods of absence from school.
<b>Elective Home Education</b>	When a child is not on the roll of a school and is educated at home. Some parents/ carers make the free choice to home educate but others do so because they feel their child's needs are not being met.
<b>Exclusion</b>	Removal of a student from a school due to serious or repeated breaches of behavior policy, or to protect the welfare of that student or others.
<b>External Alternative Provision</b>	Education that does not take place at a mainstream or special school. This includes pupil referral units, alternative provision academies, as well as independent and non-registered schools.
<b>Graduated response</b>	A model of action and early intervention in education settings, schools and colleges to help children and young people who require additional support. The approach recognises that there is a continuum of needs and that, where necessary, increasing specialist expertise should be brought to bear on the difficulties that a child or young person may be experiencing.
<b>Internal Alternative Provision</b>	Internal alternative provision is an in-school supportive intervention for children at risk of some form of exclusion or absence which acts (at least partially) in place of mainstream lessons for a specific period of time. It is part of a graduated response and includes identification of barriers to engagement with school, adaptive curriculum delivery, support with social and emotional mental health needs and support with transition either back to mainstream lessons or into an appropriate onward pathway. Internal alternative provision is usually funded by the school and is ideally part of a wider whole-school inclusion strategy.
<b>Isolation rooms/ Removal Rooms</b>	Removal rooms are where a pupil, for serious disciplinary reasons, is required to spend time away from the classroom at the instruction of a member of staff. This is to be differentiated from circumstances in which a pupil is asked to step outside of the classroom briefly for a conversation with a staff member and asked to return following this (DfE, 2024).
<b>Lost Learning</b>	Lost learning occurs when a child is not at school, engaged in the classroom, participating in their education, or is forced to move out of their local community setting (Gill et al., 2024).

<b>Mainstream School</b>	All schools that are not a special or alternative provision school.
<b>Managed Moves</b>	A permanent move of a child from one school to another. This should only take place when it is in the best interest of the child and on a voluntary basis.
<b>Off-site Direction</b>	A power in section 29A of the Education Act 2002 that allows maintained schools to direct a child off-site for their education for the purpose of improving their behaviour. Whilst the legislation does not apply to academies, they can arrange off- site provision for such purposes under their general powers.
<b>Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) survey</b>	The Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) is a short self-evaluation survey that may be used to gain insight into attitudes that could be hindering achievement. It can capture feelings about school and teachers, and help to detect possible barriers to learning.
<b>Post-16 Pathway</b>	Education, learning or training experiences that take place after a pupil turns 16.
<b>Reintegration</b>	Reintegration refers to the process by which a student returns to and re-engages with the mainstream school environment after disruption, and is able to participate academically, socially, and emotionally in a stable, supported, and productive manner.
<b>SEN Units and Resourced Provision</b>	Special Educational Needs Units are formally recognised by the local authority and receive high needs place funding to support pupils with special educational needs.
<b>Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEN)</b>	A legal term referring to a child with a learning difficulty or disability which calls for education provision that is additional to, or different from provision made generally available for other children of the same age.
<b>Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)</b>	SEMH is a type of SEND, encompassing difficulties in emotional regulation, social interactions, and mental wellbeing that can hinder a child's learning and development.
<b>Social Emotional Learning (SEL)</b>	The development of a child's social and emotional skills, such as relationships, communication, self-esteem and behaviour.
<b>Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo)</b>	The qualified teacher in a school responsible for the day to day operation of the special educational needs policy.
<b>Special School</b>	Schools which provide education and support to pupils with special educational needs.
<b>Suspension</b>	A sanction where a child is sent home for a period of time, up to a maximum of 45 days in a school year.
<b>Whole School Inclusion</b>	Whole school inclusion means all staff supporting the learning, wellbeing and safety needs of all children, so that they belong, achieve and thrive.

# Foreword

**Jamie Rogers**, Director of Programmes  
& Partnerships, The Difference



**Internal alternative provision**, as many schools have come to call it, is not new. But its adoption in primary and secondary schools across England is rapidly accelerating. This brings with it a window of great opportunity, but also clear risks, both of which this report seeks to explore. This report draws on extensive research by Dr. Emma Simpson and is grounded in the wider work of The Difference's team, who have been supporting schools nationally in the design, implementation and evaluation of internal alternative provision across all phases.

**When done well, internal provision has the power to re-engage, reintegrate, and reignite a love of learning.**

We've worked alongside school leaders to build financially viable provisions that have delivered tangible, often path altering outcomes for children. This work supports children at risk of disengaging from their education. It's been a privilege to collaborate, problem-solve, and celebrate alongside leaders through the inevitable ups and downs of this journey.

When done well, internal provision fosters deep community collaboration. It can nurture connections between schools and families, shape whole-school culture, and drive school improvement. With high expectations, it has the power to re-engage, reintegrate, and reignite a love of learning, and ultimately, boost achievement. We've seen this across The Difference's network. In Newcastle. In Salford. In Nottingham. In Bolton. In Watford. In Exeter. In fact, we are starting to see this everywhere.

This is a testament to the creativity and determination of support staff, teachers, and leaders, very often working on limited budgets. Their ability to repurpose what's available into effective support for children who need it is a key commonality in the rise of internal alternative provision. In a space where practice has outpaced policy, schools and trusts are building provision from the ground up.

But we must be clear that this is not a silver bullet. Internal alternative provision is complex, specialist work. It demands strong teaching, intentional planning, and relentless adaptability. What works one year may not work the next. What helps one student may not help another. When provisions are poorly planned, or operate without strong foundations in whole-school inclusion, they can unintentionally do harm and quickly become financially unsustainable. Underdeveloped curricula, low expectations, and poor planning can deepen learning gaps for those children already approaching the spaghetti junction of critical lost learning.

Much will be said about terminology. We use "internal alternative provision" not to add yet another acronym to the system, but because it reflects the language adopted by most schools in our network. In truth, what matters most is not the name, be it Base, Bridge, Hub or Haven, but the quality and impact of the provision itself. In our work with leaders, choosing a local name that reduces perceived stigma within the school community matters more than the umbrella term the sector may or may not settle on. That is not to say there isn't a need for a wider discussion about the importance of language.

With this report, The Difference aims to share learning that's been hard-won by early adopters. As internal alternative provision continues to grow, The Difference remains committed to supporting leaders and collaborating with policymakers to ensure quality keeps pace with scale.

Please get in touch if you would like to discuss your own provision and wider whole school inclusion by emailing [jamie@the-difference.com](mailto:jamie@the-difference.com).

# Introduction

“ If I didn’t go to Connections [the internal alternative provision] I probably wouldn’t be in this school and I wouldn’t have an education. It’s helped me a lot.

**Mandy** child in the North West

England is experiencing a crisis of lost learning, with record breaking rates of exclusions, absence and growing numbers of children flowing into an already struggling special and alternative provision sector (Gill et al. 2024). The Difference is working with pioneering schools, who are facing this issue head on, by developing new tools and systems to try to keep as many children as possible thriving in mainstream schools. This includes promising practices to develop and deliver what has become known as ‘internal alternative provision’.

Schools across the country are setting up such provisions as a way to give children the support they need and keep them within the school community. They’re acting out of commitment and urgency, but doing so in a landscape with limited guidance, research, or evidence about what works. These pioneers are navigating uncharted territory, and their efforts need stronger support and clearer direction to ensure lasting, positive impact for the students they serve.

The importance of getting internal alternative provision right cannot be overstated. If done well, it can support belonging, wellbeing and attainment. If done badly, it has the potential to inadvertently become another form of exclusion, where children continue to miss out on learning, furthering their disengagement from their education and school community. One child reflected on their experience in a problematic provision:

*Places like this shouldn’t be a thing. Places that just make people feel down. When I was in here, I felt like I was different to everyone else. They told me it wasn’t a punishment, but it was a punishment.*

Lewis, a child who attended an internal alternative provision before it went through significant changes, South East

This report aims to fill the gap on what ‘good’ internal alternative provision looks like so that we can create spaces that truly promote and meet the learning, wellbeing and safety needs of our children and their families.

## Defining internal alternative provision

Schools have delivered on-site provision for children at risk of exclusion or absence for many

**Internal alternative provision** is an in-school supportive intervention for children at risk of some form of exclusion or absence which acts (at least partially) in place of mainstream lessons for a specific period of time. It is part of a graduated response and includes identification of barriers to engagement with school, adaptive curriculum delivery, support with social, emotional and mental health needs and support with transition either back to mainstream lessons or into an appropriate onward pathway. Internal alternative provision is usually funded by the school and is ideally part of a wider whole school inclusion strategy.

years. They have taken many forms, from short-stay punitive spaces (e.g. isolation/seclusion room, internal exclusion/inclusion room) to longer-term ‘remedial’ placements in separate spaces such as behaviour support units. The internal alternative provisions in this research are different:

- 1. They provide high-quality teaching and learning alongside attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning.** This is different to behaviour support units which prioritise a therapeutic approach to perceived deficits in children and their families (Gillies and Robinson, 2012) or inclusion/seclusion rooms which prioritise keeping up with learning whilst children ‘do time’ for a misdemeanour (Barker et al, 2010; Gilmore, 2012; Parsons, 2005).

2. **They are embedded within the mainstream school community.** Most often, they are spaces in the school which enable children to have varying levels of contact with their peers and the mainstream offer while receiving targeted support for their learning.
3. **They are set up to cater for children who are at risk of various forms of lost learning** (Gill et al., 2024). In some schools, there is different provision for children presenting behaviour issues, to those experiencing anxiety or emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA). However, in many, provision is combined.

In many ways, internal alternative provisions are more akin to external alternative provisions in terms of what they offer. However, they have the advantage of closer links with the mainstream school. This reduces the negative impact of being 'excluded' from their peers and community; supports hybrid provision and reintegration; and has the potential to support better outcomes than those associated with external alternative provision (Gill et al., 2024). External and internal alternative provision are subject to similar challenges, such as ensuring quality (Centre for Social Justice, 2023), lack of funding and cuts to support services (Bryant et al., 2018). There are also similarities in

'what works', for example, relational practices, collaboration and shared responsibility between professionals (DfE, 2025a; Malcolm, 2019; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014; 2016).

This report is a timely exploration of a model of mainstream-school provision that can support inclusion. In recent months there has been an increased focus on Resourced Units and SEN Units, usually funded by local authorities and aimed solely at children with SEND. The examples of internal alternative provision we explore in this report are distinct from these SEN Units, as there are often differences in terms of funding, control, referral criteria and relationship with the mainstream school.

## Tenets of effective internal alternative provision

This report sets out four tenets of effective internal alternative provision, based on sector-leading practice from schools around the country. These tenets trace a child's journey – from the initial identification of need and referral, to the support they receive, to the measurable improvements in learning and wellbeing that can result from time spent in a strong provision.

### Four tenets of effective internal alternative provision



The importance of relationships is a thread which runs through all four tenets. Relationships were spoken about in every interview – those between staff and pupils, but also peer and professional relationships, and the relationship between home and school. This is in line with an increasing evidence base that has demonstrated the power of relational practices in schools (Football Beyond Borders and Pro Bono Economics, 2024; Malcolm, 2019). Rather than constituting a separate tenet, such relationships are referred to throughout.

“ She helps me a lot. I love that. Me and her had our ups and downs sometimes but I could put my hand on my heart when I say this is one of the teachers I rate the most in this school. ‘Cause I know that she’s one of the reasons why I’m back in mainstream, because she explained situations to me. When I need help or something I will go to her.

Harvey a child in the South East

## Methods

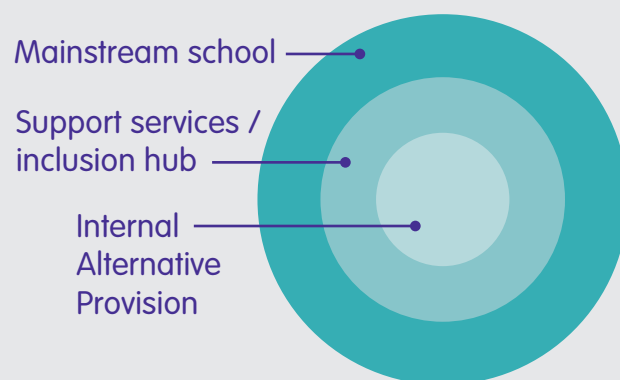
The following tenets of effective internal alternative provision and the associated practice-based lessons were identified through an in-depth research process conducted with schools across the country. We interviewed staff who have strategic responsibility for internal alternative provision, from 23 schools or trusts. This sample was selected to be representative of geography, to include primary and secondary schools, and those at different stages of their internal alternative provision journey, from starting out to established. This included schools that have completed various programmes run by The Difference and those that have not.

We also conducted five case study visits to a sample of these schools where there was evidence of promising practice. Each case study visit took place over 1-2 days and involved interviews with children/young people, staff and parents/carers and observation of the internal alternative provision in action. In total, the research comprised 65 interviews with 70 participants (43 staff, 20 children and young people, and 7 parents/ carers). Eight days were spent in schools and 20 lessons were observed. All quotes have been anonymised and children’s names are pseudonyms.

Data was subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and findings grouped to give rise to the four tenets of effective practice set out in this report. Effectiveness was determined by quantitative data relating to attendance, behaviour, academic and Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) progress as well as qualitative data; what children and young people, parents/ carers and staff said about their experiences, and observation of engagement with learning.

# TENET ONE

## Effective internal alternative provision is unified with the mainstream school



In schools where internal alternative provision truly thrives, it stands as a powerful testament to a whole school approach to inclusion, deeply embedded in the culture, values, and daily practice of the entire community. The Difference has worked with the sector to define whole school inclusion as ‘all staff supporting the learning, wellbeing and safeguarding needs of all children so that they belong, achieve and thrive’ (Harris et al., 2025). It is underpinned by four principles which can be seen as a foundation for effective internal alternative provision and recur as motifs throughout this report:

1. **Inclusion is built from the universal up.**
2. **Inclusion is a culture that is led from the top.**
3. **Inclusion is community collaboration.**
4. **Inclusion is measurable.**

Internal alternative provision should not be seen as a place to “fix” the child. Just like a struggling sunflower may thrive temporarily in a greenhouse, a child’s engagement may improve in internal alternative provision. But if they return to the same unchanged environment, they are likely to struggle again. Real success is more likely to happen if the child returns to a mainstream offer that is underpinned by strong whole school inclusion, where information from their time in the internal alternative provision helps their needs to be met.

Without this strong foundation of whole school inclusion, internal alternative provision risks exacerbating disengagement, struggling to

re-integrate children back into full time mainstream classrooms and becoming financially unsustainable.

“Internal AP will not work if the culture and the environment isn’t right. You’ve got to invest in the unification of your systems in order for it to succeed. If you just try and plonk it on top of something, it will always fail.

Staff, West Midlands

The strong relationship between the internal alternative provision and mainstream school unlocks the benefits of the provision being *internal*. This enables children to maintain a sense of belonging to the school community and to access the resources and opportunities that are available to all children. It also supports schools to position internal alternative provision as a graduated response to challenging behaviour or lost learning. This means that children have accessed other forms (or waves, or stages) of universal support and intervention before being referred to the internal alternative provision.

Effective unification with the mainstream also helps to upskill all staff to improve universal provision by supporting two-way dialogue between staff in internal alternative provision and mainstream. This bolsters the inclusive offer available to the whole school community as internal alternative provision staff can offer

## Strategies schools can use to help pupils in internal alternative provision feel included in the school community.

### Pupils may:

- Share social times with mainstream peers and/or find other ways to reduce feeling 'othered'.
- Attend assemblies and some mainstream lessons.
- Wear the same uniform.

### The internal alternative provision may:

- Use the same behaviour and rewards system.
- Communicate the same expectations and ethos.
- Be located within a mainstream school building or site.
- Use mainstream staff to deliver some lessons.
- Have mainstream staff visit at regular intervals.

### Opportunities for pupils in internal alternative provision to access mainstream resources:

- Use specialist classrooms or facilities for subjects such as food technology, music or PE.
- Take part in curriculum-related workshops delivered by visiting organisations e.g. for PSHE.
- Have access to mainstream assessment tasks and timetables.
- Access support or inclusion services available to mainstream pupils, for example behaviour intervention coaches, counselling, and learning support. This can help reintegration by providing the same support systems they access before, during and after the internal alternative provision placement.

important insights on how to reduce barriers to learning through whole staff training and pupil reintegration meetings. Additionally, close liaison over curriculum content, or mainstream staff teaching in the internal alternative provision, can ensure internal alternative provision staff stay close to the knowledge and skills covered in mainstream lessons and therefore can better support children's learning.

“The biggest piece in this has been developing a framework that by its very nature does not cause colleagues (especially in secondaries) to work in silo.

Primary and secondary Inclusion lead,  
West Midlands

## Common challenges and how they have been overcome

Without this unification of mainstream and internal alternative provision, the internal alternative provision is at risk of being another form of exclusion. This is a pitfall which some

schools have struggled to overcome. It can result in the internal alternative provision becoming a costly '*holding pen*' (staff, South East) for children who never leave, or a '*last chance saloon*' (staff, South West) – a stepping-stone to exclusion.

In addition to the strategies outlined above, schools have overcome this challenge through:

- Whole staff training on inclusive classroom practices.
- Leading culture change around what inclusion means for all staff.
- Strong internal alternative provision leadership by a member of staff who understands both the internal alternative provision and mainstream context at a strategic level and can advocate for an integrated approach.
- Including internal alternative provision staff in mainstream leadership systems e.g. senior leader and middle leader teams and meetings.
- Developing vocal staff champions who talk positively about the internal alternative provision and find ways to create links between the internal alternative provision and mainstream.

Queen Elizabeth High School is a mixed secondary school serving a rural population in mid Devon. Their Inclusion Lead is part of The Difference community, having completed the Inclusive Leadership Course. Significant time and effort have been put into staff training and establishing systems to ensure that their internal alternative provision, the Hive, is part of a joined up approach to whole-school inclusion.

“ We’re all in it together. We want the best for our community, we want the best for our students. That’s why we’re not sending them to external APs. But we’ve all got a responsibility and a part to play.

Staff at Queen Elizabeth High School

The Hive is located in a small house on the main school site where up to eight KS3 and KS4 children with attendance or behaviour issues study core academic subjects from 9:30am-12:30pm and focus on enrichment and personal development activities from 1:00-2:30pm. In the morning, it is staffed by an experienced Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HTLA) who has tutored to GCSE level in English, Maths, Science and Geography. In the afternoon, a wellbeing specialist takes over. Children follow the mainstream curriculum and receive feedback on written work and some specialist input from mainstream teachers. The Hive lead is present full time and there is close liaison with the senior leader for inclusion, who visits regularly to meet with staff and students on a planned and drop in basis.

In the main school building is the Inclusion Hub – a corridor which houses support services available for all pupils: pastoral, SEND, wellbeing, timeout, and medical. Having all support services in one area has had a positive impact on movement around the school and ensures that children quickly receive the right support. Pupils from the Hive are likely to access these services before, during and after their placement, which helps provide continuity and maintain links with the mainstream school. Furthermore, it is where Hive pupils who travel to and fro on school buses spend time before and after the Hive school day.

The ideal aim for pupils is reintegration. This happens in a planned and supported way at a pace which is suited to each child. However, there are some children and young people, particularly those in KS4 with a history of absence, who will remain in the Hive until the end of Year 11. For them, it is an important sanctuary which enables them to secure qualifications and a meaningful post-16 pathway in a safe space, whilst accessing the subject specialists, facilities and social opportunities available in the mainstream school.

Mainstream staff have extensive training on the purpose of The Hive, how it works and what part they play in supporting children, whether that’s visiting children during their placement to strengthen relationships or give feedback on work, or welcoming them back into mainstream lessons. This joined-up approach enables the Hive to function as part of a graduated response, supported by systems and staff working across the school.

“ It’s a place where people go to work and just be themselves.

Phoebe, a child in the Hive

## TENET ONE

Effective internal alternative provision is unified with the mainstream school

### Key takeaways

- The culture of the mainstream school affects the success of the internal alternative provision: strong whole school inclusion supports effective internal alternative provision.
- Children who access the internal alternative provision should still feel a sense of belonging to the school community.
- The internal alternative provision should work as part of the school's inclusion/support systems and involve collaboration and shared responsibility.

## TENET TWO

# Effective internal alternative provision identifies learning, wellbeing, and safety needs



### Robust referral process

A strong internal alternative provision has a robust referral process which is data driven and involves multiple professionals.

Internal alternative provision is best used when various other forms of support and intervention have been tried and evaluated. Referral should therefore be part of whole school support/inclusion systems. In some schools, referral forms include a checklist of other types of support which should already have been tried e.g. Tutor report, Head of Year report, SEN assessment, mentoring, small group interventions, time out card, attendance support plan, meetings with parents/carers.

It is important that the referral process incorporates enough time to consult multiple professionals and involve parents/carers and the child. Such professionals most often include: Internal Alternative Provision Lead, Head of Year and/or other pastoral staff, SENCo, Senior Leader and DSL. Where whole school inclusion is strong, these professionals are likely to already meet regularly to holistically consider the needs of children experiencing vulnerabilities or difficulties. Clear criteria ensure that an internal alternative provision placement is being used as the most appropriate support to reduce lost learning.

### A place of support, not sanction

For internal alternative provision to achieve its purpose, it must be consistently experienced and understood by staff, children, and parents/carers as a supportive intervention rooted in inclusion, not discipline. It should be seen as part of an inclusive pathway, not a continuation of sanctions.

“ [Internal alternative provision name] is almost like a haven, a safe place where she can come.

Staff, South West

Effective internal alternative provisions which use the principles of whole school inclusion deploy staff from pastoral, SEND, behaviour and attendance teams who work alongside each other to diagnose need and provide appropriate support that addresses root causes. Support may include speech and language therapy, literacy intervention or mental health support. A productive framing is to see such children as ‘priority pupils’ who have learning, wellbeing and safety needs which the internal alternative provision can help to identify and support (like SEN and Resource Units).

“ One of the reasons why I love this [job] is our children come in here with a lot of baggage and before we teach them, we have to unpack. You know when you sew on the wrong side of the fabric, you have to unpick it to get it right. And for us here, you have to unpick what the issues are.

Staff, South East

Truly positioning internal alternative provision as a supportive and effective intervention rather than a punishment in the minds of students, parents/carers and staff alike requires a concerted effort. How an internal alternative provision is perceived is largely determined by children's experiences. Positive messages will not be believed unless children attending:

- Feel supported.
- Feel that they are learning effectively.
- Experience a successful transition.

Staff perception also matters. This is affected by:

- The relationship between the internal alternative provision and the mainstream school (see Tenet 1).
- Mainstream staff teaching in the internal alternative provision, and what they share with other staff.
- Staff experience of receiving children who transition back into regular lessons.

## Common challenges and how they have been overcome

### Referral

If there are not robust referral processes in place, the internal alternative provision can become a reactive '**dumping ground**' (staff, North West) for children displaying challenging behaviour, or used as an alternative to suspension. This makes it difficult to establish a positive culture and to re-engage children with learning.

As well as establishing a proper referral process, schools have overcome this challenge through clear communication with all staff about the purpose of the internal alternative provision and through the understanding and support of the senior leadership team.

### Staff and child perception

A common challenge is when children experience the internal alternative provision as a punishment and staff perceive it as a place for '**naughty children**' (staff, North West). Or, staff perceive it as a '**fluffy space**' (staff, West Midlands) where children have treats and a nice time, but no serious learning takes place.

It can be difficult to establish a positive perception of internal alternative provision, particularly if there has previously been a more punitive provision in the same space, and/or the same staff run it. Physical location or environment can also undermine positive messaging. For example, if the internal alternative provision is in close proximity to punitive spaces, or if the internal alternative provision is a tatty or unattractive physical space which communicates lack of value, care or rigorous approach to learning.

Negative perceptions of the internal alternative provision and/or of external alternative provision can also make parents/carers resistant to an internal alternative provision placement. This can be an additional hurdle for schools and make it more difficult for the children to approach it positively. Schools often go on a journey to shift perception. This involves intentional action and takes time, but can be done. Here are some examples of practices which have supported this journey:

- Strong leadership to convey vision and bring internal alternative provision staff with them.
- Strong communication with all staff and children about the purpose and working of the internal alternative provision e.g. through assemblies, staff training and briefings.
- Investment in the physical environment of the internal alternative provision.
- Clear communication with parents/carers including the opportunity to come into the internal alternative provision.
- Inviting mainstream staff to teach in, and visit, the internal alternative provision.
- A strong offer which results in a positive experience (see Tenet 3).
- Children make successful transitions which demonstrate the internal alternative provision's effectiveness.

The Student Support Centre (SSC) is the KS3 internal alternative provision at Lister Community School, a mixed secondary comprehensive in a disadvantaged area of London. It is located in a suite of rooms within a main school building. The SSC lead, who took part in The Difference's Leadership Programme, has worked hard to bring this provision on a positive journey. He delivers whole school staff training on inclusive practices and assemblies about the SSC so that all staff and children understand its purpose. Now it is perceived by staff, children and parents/carers alike as a supportive space which re-engages children with learning and builds self-esteem and the social and emotional skills they need to cope with mainstream school. This has been achieved through strong leadership, effective communication and developing an offer which provides high quality teaching and learning in a warm, 'family' environment where kindness and honesty are overtly valued.

“It's not for naughty kids, it's for people who need help, not just with their behaviour but if they've missed too many days of school, stuff like that... Two of my friends went. Before that, they would mess around a lot and stuff. When they came out, they decided to behave better, they get less concerns and that now.

**Mohamed**, a mainstream pupil with no direct experience of the SSC

The SSC is a six week 'reintegration' provision with a new cohort of up to twelve KS3 students every half term. Referral begins a month in advance and involves the SSC lead, the SENCo, the pastoral team, the safeguarding lead and a senior leader. Together, they look at attendance, behaviour, academic, pastoral and SEN data for children who have been referred and discuss how an SSC placement could support each child. Prior to the placement, parents/carers are contacted to explain the offer and ensure they are on board.

“I can't fault the SSC – the time and care the staff have for my daughter, the help she gets with her work.

**Mary**, the parent of child attending SSC

For the first week of the placement, pupils attend all sessions in the SSC to establish routines and expectations and bond as a group. During this week, staff carry out a needs assessment with each pupil, set individual targets and put in place appropriate intervention. Pupils study academic subjects, taught by a mixture of SSC and mainstream staff, and take part in a programme of personal development, some of which use mainstream facilities, such as PE and food technology spaces. Pupils continue to share break and lunch times with mainstream peers. These practices help maintain relationships with friends and staff and nurture a strong sense of belonging.

“We always say we're a community, we're a family. So that helps them feel a part of something. I think when they leave they still feel a part of that....and then [they] find that everybody's like that in the school. It's not just us in this provision. All the teachers have got a vested interest in you.

**SSC staff**

From the second week, pupils follow a hybrid timetable whereby they attend an increasing number of mainstream lessons. All pupils rate their timetable using a traffic light system, and return first to 'green' lessons in which they are already experiencing success. As the weeks go on, they gradually introduce more lessons.

*continued...*

Reintegration is ‘*step by step... two way traffic...between the student and the mainstream teacher*’ (SSC staff). In preparation, the SSC lead meets with relevant teachers to discuss helpful strategies, likely triggers and the pupil’s progress. This includes encouraging staff to visit the SSC to see the pupil being successful and develop a relationship in a safe space. When it is helpful to pupils they are dropped off and picked up from their mainstream lessons and there is follow-up communication with teachers to monitor progress. After pupils have fully reintegrated and their placement has ended, they are still welcome to visit the SSC at break time.

“Genuinely my favourite part of the week is coming [here]. I am legit happy because it’s number one. It’s a lovely break from mainstream – that satisfaction I feel as a teacher on seeing my students learn every single lesson without fail, seeing how much they want to learn, and knowing that they came from a place where it wasn’t always the attitude that they had. I think that’s a really pretty beautiful thing.

Mainstream teacher who teaches in SSC

SSC staff are committed to working with children who need extra support to help them ‘*move forward in life and have those skills and that confidence*’ (SSC staff). Central to its success is identification of need, strong relationships and skills to ensure those needs are met.

## TENET TWO

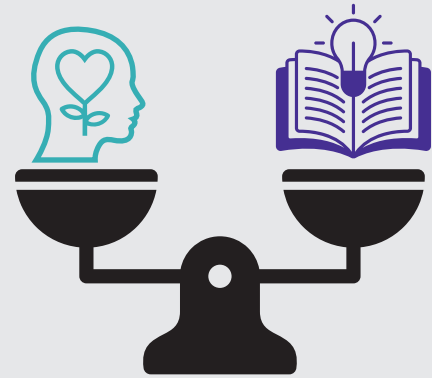
Effective internal alternative provision identifies learning, wellbeing and safety needs

### Key takeaways

- Referral must be data driven and involve multiple professionals.
- An internal alternative provision is a place of support, not sanction.
- An internal alternative provision should accurately identify the learning, wellbeing, and safety needs of pupils and respond with appropriate support.
- Communication and lived experience are key to how the internal alternative provision is perceived.

## TENET THREE

# Effective internal alternative provision balances academic progress and wellbeing



Children and young people in internal alternative provision need a rich offer which balances high quality teaching and learning, assessment and intervention, and support for the social and emotional aspects of learning. This offer should not be a step down from mainstream education, but a carefully enhanced and comparable version of it, finely tuned to meet each pupil's unique needs. It is a form of targeted intervention which enables pupils to experience success.

“ I think previously this was seen as a holding pen. Staff had said all the children are so traumatised that they can't engage with learning, we need to deal with their trauma and their difficulties first. My view is always, yes, I know they're traumatised, but we can still teach Romeo and Juliet, and we can still do Pythagoras and teaching and learning comes first.

Staff, South East

When internal alternative provisions are successful, they do not lower standards, they raise them.

### A high quality offer

Internal alternative provision pupils should have access to a core academic and pastoral offer comparable to mainstream pupils, including:

- High quality teaching and learning.
- Access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

- Assessment and monitoring of progress.
- Pastoral support.

The provision of high quality teaching and learning is a key feature which distinguishes 'modern' internal alternative provisions from the behaviour support units of previous times (Gillies and Robinson, 2012). The use of mainstream subject specialists to teach at least some lessons can contribute to comparability and supports reintegration by providing opportunities for pupils to form relationships with teachers they will come across in mainstream lessons. Hybrid timetables are often used to support high quality teaching and learning and reintegration, and to increase internal alternative provision capacity.

“ We're giving you the best teachers and the most experienced teachers rather than just, you know, what's left over from the timetable. Because I think otherwise, it's not fair to expect that it's going to be successful.

Staff, North

To make space for various forms of support and intervention, the internal alternative provision may not be able to offer a complete mainstream curriculum. However, strong internal alternative provisions ensure that there is still breadth and balance in terms of subjects. This can be achieved in various ways. For example, a core subject offer is supplemented by 'enrichment' activities which offer breadth and balance, for instance: creative

therapy, horticulture, and physical education. In terms of the core curriculum, it may be that less content is taught, but what is lost in volume can be made up for in depth as pupils have time to consolidate skills and knowledge in ways that are not possible in a mainstream classroom. The curriculum can therefore be viewed as comparable in terms of learning opportunities and experiences, even if it is not exactly the same.

“All of them are good teachers. I really like it... [they are] very patient and stuff... [they] don't do too much rushing.

Sofia, a child in the South East

In addition to the core, a strong internal alternative provision can offer:

- A calm and welcoming environment.
- Small group sizes.
- High staff to pupil ratio.
- One to one or small group interventions and therapies (e.g. speech and language therapy, behaviour management, emotional regulation, counselling, literacy, numeracy).
- Further enrichment opportunities (e.g. sailing, mountain biking, debating).
- Leadership opportunities (e.g. with younger pupils, or through project based learning).
- Opportunities for pupil voice and agency.
- Attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning.
- Explicit support for social skills and emotional regulation.
- Strong and trusted relationships between pupils and staff, and between peers.
- Frequent dialogue, relationship building and partnership work with parents/carers.

“[The internal alternative provision] is helping me with how to manage my anger.

Layla, a child in the South East

“[Staff are helpful] telling us where we went wrong, and if we were wrong, and making sure that our opinions are heard.

Jack, a child in the South East

An emphasis on the social and emotional aspects of learning, and the trusted relationships which ensue, are two of the most crucial and consistent features of strong internal alternative provisions. These ‘ingredients’ are consistent with findings from a range of sources which suggest the importance of relational and holistic practices (EEF, 2024; Square Peg, 2024; Adams, 2023; Riele et al., 2017; Baroutsis, 2016).

## Assessment and monitoring during an internal alternative provision placement

At the beginning of an internal alternative provision placement, an SEMH assessment<sup>i</sup> is often used, together with information collected through the referral process, to determine what support and intervention the pupil needs and to form a baseline from which progress can be tracked. Tools used by staff for this purpose include the Boxall Profile and PASS survey. Information related to a pupil’s academic attainment, SEN and behaviour should be collected through the referral process. However, often an SEMH need is often ‘*under the bonnet*’ (staff, South West) and requires understanding and targeted intervention. Parents/carers and pupils are also important sources of information for a holistic understanding.

Whilst a pupil is in the care of an internal alternative provision, their progress should be assessed and monitored, just as happens in the mainstream, but with more detail and frequency. There is usually daily monitoring and feedback about engagement, learning, behaviour, social skills, and emotional state. This often happens through check-in and check-out or other meta-cognitive routines, as well as staff observation.

i. New Department of Education data (2025b) shows that 93,700 more children were identified with special educational needs in the 2024/25 academic year in comparison to the previous academic year. This includes over 34,000 more children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

As in the mainstream, subject teachers are also engaged in formative and summative assessment of academic progress. In addition, regular reviews (every 3-6 weeks) are scheduled with parents/ carers and staff to inform support plans, monitor progress against targets and prepare for transition.

We are seeing promising emerging evidence that this approach works. In one school, their robust data capture and measuring of progress means they know whether children are improving on the skills they need to be successful in mainstream classes full time:

*We've got a clear plan, we've got a clear referral process, we've got a clear evaluation process...80% of students who have been in [the internal alternative provision] for more than 3 weeks have improved their social emotional health.*

Staff, South West

## Common challenges and how they have been overcome

Like with all education, the quality of the internal alternative provision offer is critical to success. If teaching and learning are poor, or social and emotional learning are not foregrounded skilfully enough to ensure productive social dynamics, the internal alternative provision is in danger of being little more than a place to hang out or, worse, ingrains ways of being and expectations that severely limit pupils' chances of successful transition. In short, it becomes another form of exclusion. Getting the offer right is not easy, but it can be done. The table below summarises some common challenges and how schools have overcome them.

The challenge	Common difficulties	How schools have overcome these challenges
<b>Curriculum model</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What subjects to include.</li> <li>• What to teach a mixed age group.</li> <li>• How to teach mixed age groups.</li> <li>• How to select core content when pace needs to be slower.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Split provision into key stages.</li> <li>• Use bespoke units of work e.g. a spiral curriculum of key skills or project based learning.</li> <li>• Respond to pupil interests.</li> <li>• Liaise with mainstream staff to identify core content.</li> </ul>
<b>High quality teaching and learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal alternative provision staff may not be qualified teachers.</li> <li>• Teachers are allocated based on slack in their timetable. This can result in lack of consistency when internal alternative provision pupils have more than one teacher per subject, as well as lack of motivation/ expertise to teach in an internal alternative provision context.</li> <li>• Teachers lack training in how to teach pupils with complex needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some mainstream teachers teach in the internal alternative provision.</li> <li>• Internal alternative provision timetable is completed early in the timetabling process to ensure teachers with skills and interest are allocated.</li> <li>• Provide training for all mainstream teachers who teach in the internal alternative provision.</li> <li>• Reframe teaching in internal alternative provision as a privilege reserved for the strongest teachers where creativity and innovation are valued.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued...</i></p>

The challenge	Common difficulties	How schools have overcome these challenges
<b>Staffing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to recruit the right staff.</li> <li>• Difficult to get long standing members of staff on board with a new vision.</li> <li>• Staff do not have the skills to ensure success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong leadership.</li> <li>• Invest in staff training and development, including redeployment.</li> <li>• Broaden recruitment criteria and advertising strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to justify staffing costs for a small number of pupils.</li> <li>• Difficult to find money for capital expenditure e.g. on facilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See internal alternative provision students as a branch of SEND.</li> <li>• Calculate cost of permanent exclusion or external alternative provision and compare with cost of internal alternative provision.</li> <li>• Map local assets – organisations which may be able to offer opportunities or expertise</li> <li>• Involve pupils in improving internal alternative provision space e.g. outdoor work, horticulture, and art.</li> </ul>

### CASE STUDY THREE:

## Matthew Moss High School, Rochdale

“X is one of the best teachers we’ve ever met in life...she is an angel of the teaching world.

Georgia, a parent

Connections is named because it nurtures pupils’ connections: with staff; each other; the mainstream school; the wider community; and their learning. It is housed in a suite of rooms within the main building of a mixed secondary school in Rochdale and led by a current member of The Difference’s Inclusive Leadership Course.

Connections aims to reintegrate KS3 and KS4 pupils into mainstream lessons as part of a one to three term placement which provides high quality teaching and learning alongside supportive relationships and targeted interventions. The offer in Connections is shaped to support pupils and re-engage them with learning so that they can both reintegrate into mainstream education and, perhaps more importantly, find their place in the world beyond. This requires a careful balance between attention to academic progress and wellbeing.

It is staffed by two full time qualified teachers, both with SEND training, and two teaching assistants. Core subjects, including humanities, are taught by specialist teachers from the mainstream or Connections team. Teaching takes place in separate KS3 and KS4 classes to ensure that every pupil has access to the most appropriate curriculum and does not fall behind. KS4 pupils attend GCSE option subjects alongside mainstream peers. Some also take vocational courses via a small selection of local providers, where their experiences are carefully monitored by Connections staff. A double period of outdoor work is on everyone’s timetable, taught by a long-standing member of staff who organises trips and projects for pupils which engage them with their local community.

*continued...*

“In here, you’re still used to being in the school and in the routine of being in school. I found this helped a lot more [than external AP].

**Elliot**, a child who attended Connections

Pupils have access to sensory breaks and trusted adults to support them to work through daily issues. They also have access to mentoring and interventions such as emotional literacy and speech and language therapy. There is support for peer relationships, and pupils are free to join mainstream peers during break times. Connections staff have close relationships with parents and carers and communicate regularly in ways which are both responsive and planned.

Attendance rates often improve dramatically as a result of a Connections placement and reintegration rates are high and sustained. Anna’s attendance was 59% before joining Connections. It is now 93%. She says:

*[The learning is] easier to sink into my head because they’re working with you and not at you.*

Strong communication with mainstream staff and universal support services (such as mentoring) supports the reintegration process. After a six month placement in Connections, Johnny reintegrated fully back into mainstream and is thriving. He says:

*...the work, it’s not the same, but it’s the same curriculum. It’s not useless stuff. It’s the same difficulty, same GCSE learning. When I did my mock the other week, something that I did in Connections come up. And I didn’t do it in normal mainstream lessons, I did it in Connections. So it helped me there.*

## TENET THREE

Effective internal alternative provision balances academic progress and wellbeing

### Key takeaways

- High quality teaching and learning are critical.
- Attention to, and explicit planning for wellbeing and the social and emotional aspects of pupils’ experiences are equally important.
- Communication and the sharing of expertise benefits staff in the mainstream and in the internal alternative provision, making both stronger.

## TENET FOUR

# Effective internal alternative provision is shaped by measurable pupil outcomes



“ One boy used to spend 80% of the time on his own in a corner of the library. Now he is in the mainstream classroom 80% of the time.

Staff, West Midlands

Where internal alternative provisions are working well, they are shaped by measurable pupil outcomes. These are outcomes which serve the best interests of the pupil. An ideal outcome for a financially sustainable provision is **successful reintegration into mainstream education**, measured through a range of indicators such as academic progress, attendance, wellbeing, and behaviour. However, in some circumstances, remaining in school to secure **qualifications and a post-16 pathway (KS4)**, or **a place at a special school**, can be valuable outcomes. Such measurable outcomes support pupils' engagement with education and wellbeing and reduce lost learning.

Internal alternative provisions are often set up to meet immediate needs: those of pupils displaying challenging behaviour or not wanting to come to school. Sometimes there is a tension between meeting the needs of the individual and the school community. There is also pressure to meet school targets such as those to reduce suspension, exclusion and absence. However, a reactive or target driven approach can lead to a **'holding pen'** (staff, South East) or **'revolving door'** (staff, Midlands) model which neither results in pupil outcomes which are in their best interests, or meets the longer term needs of the whole

school community. Such provisions can quickly become financially unsustainable.

An effective internal alternative provision supports and is supported by strong whole school inclusion. If an internal alternative provision is shaped by measurable pupil outcomes, both the needs of the individual and wider school can be met. When the internal alternative provision is designed to improve pupil engagement in learning, wellbeing and relationships, it means that attendance, behaviour and academic progress improve, which benefit both the individual and community. Similarly, behaviours further down The Difference's lost learning continuum, such as internal truancy and detentions, are tackled which again benefit both the individual and community.

Successful reintegration is the most desirable outcome for pupils, as research shows that mainstream education leads to the best educational results (Power and Taylor, 2020). In this report, successful reintegration refers to when a child or young person returns and re-engages with mainstream schooling and is able to participate academically, socially, and emotionally in a stable, supported, and productive manner. This can be evidenced by measurable pupil outcomes: improvement in areas such as academic progress, attendance, wellbeing, and behaviour compared to their performance before entering internal alternative provision.

Reintegration is also important in terms of the capacity and sustainability of the internal alternative provision: when pupils move through

the internal alternative provision there is more space for others. This means that an expensive resource benefits more pupils and makes a larger contribution to inclusion across the school.

“ There’s a sense of a finite time the students will be here for. When they join, they know it’s for that half term. So they know they can measure their success by how many lessons they’re getting back into.

Staff, South East

At times, particularly for KS4 pupils, the purpose of the internal alternative provision is to enable the pupil to remain in school whilst they secure qualifications and a post-16 pathway. This is most often relevant for pupils with a history of severe absence. However, on occasion it can be part of a graduated response to enable pupils at risk of exclusion to access education and support for successful transition into further education, training or employment. Here, a range of qualifications are valuable: vocational and functional skills as well as academic. When used for this purpose, internal alternative provision can protect pupils from: lost learning; the experience of exclusion; the risks associated with being ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET) and/or excluded.

“ It just brings a lot of opportunities... Now I’ve got this, I actually have the time, the energy and the space to work towards my GCSEs when I haven’t been in school for like two years.

Freddie, a child in the South West

Strong whole school inclusion, together with wider education reforms, should enable mainstream schools to meet a range of needs and reduce the demand for places at special schools. However, there is a minority of pupils for whom a mainstream setting is not right. In these exceptional circumstances, access to internal alternative provision can be an important way to reduce lost learning and support social and emotional health whilst a place at a special school is secured. This happens more often in the primary phase and should be resolved before the pupil reaches secondary.

The ways in which pupil outcomes shape the design of the internal alternative provision are set out in the table on the following page.

## Planned and supported transition

Planned and supported transition out of the internal alternative provision is key. Reintegration is often supported through hybrid timetables whereby a pupil attends an increasing number of mainstream lessons. There is often some flexibility so that reintegration happens at a pace which is right for each pupil, although some models require a more uniform process to make space for incoming pupils.

“ I can name so many students that are going back to mainstream, that are doing well...now they’re able to sit and do their work and want to share their progress with you...We don’t want them to be dependent on us. And I think that’s the key – enabling them to make the right decisions for their own life.

Staff, South East

Whether transition is back to mainstream lessons or onward to another setting, the following are important ingredients for success:

- Communication between internal alternative provision staff and those receiving the pupil regarding helpful strategies and potential triggers. A ‘pupil passport’ which contains this information is useful, but conversations are also needed to allow questions and discussion.
- Clear expectations of how staff who receive the pupil contribute to the transition process – their role and responsibilities
- Time spent in the destination setting
- Support to build relationships with staff with whom the pupil will be working.
- Strategies to increase pupil agency e.g. choice about which lessons to reintegrate into first and the speed, or choice about how long to spend in a new setting.

	Reintegration	Qualifications and a post-16 pathway
Curriculum	Pupils cannot fall behind if they are to fit back into mainstream lessons. Learning needs to be engaging and meaningful.	Pupils need access to core subjects and skills, and opportunities to pursue other academic and vocational interests.
Staffing	Pupils benefit from building relationships with mainstream staff whose lessons they may return to. Staff quality is key to engagement and progress.	Pupils benefit from access to mainstream teacher expertise and feedback. Staff need knowledge of post-16 options.
Assessment	The right support should be in place, together with a data informed system to know when they are ready to reintegrate.	Clear criteria are needed to ensure the right pupils benefit from a limited number of places. Strong formative and summative assessment is needed.
Communication	Communication is needed with mainstream staff to share useful strategies. Consistency is needed between mainstream and internal alternative provision spaces.	Communication is needed with external organisations who may provide vocational courses and onward pathways.
Measurement	Reintegration rate. This includes follow up monitoring to measure sustained success across a range of indicators (attendance, progress, wellbeing, progress etc).	Qualifications (a full range), indicators of engagement (attendance, progress, wellbeing), secure and successful post-16 pathway (retention rate).

- Follow up support once transition is complete. When the purpose is reintegration, the internal alternative provision often remains a ‘**safe place**’ (staff, North West) which pupils visit to check-in with trusted staff or seek support during difficult times.

Strong referral, monitoring and transition all involve robust use of data. However, clear pathways in and out involve more than data – they involve structures, processes and types of communication and partnership work which go beyond data. It is useful to note that robust monitoring and support for transition are consistent with the recommendations made in the IntegratEd report into Alternative Provision Quality Metrics (IntegratEd, 2023).

## Common challenges and how they have been overcome

If internal alternative provisions are not shaped by measurable pupil outcomes, there is a risk that school targets to reduce suspensions, exclusions and absence inadvertently drive exclusionary practices. The internal alternative provision can become a reactive response to where to put pupils displaying challenging behaviour or not wanting to come to school. It then functions as an expensive ‘**holding pen**’ (staff, South East) which quickly reaches capacity and does not re-engage pupils with education. When this happens, it can also become a stepping-stone to practices such as managed moves, off-site direction or elective home education which have been shown to exacerbate inequalities (Harris et al., 2024). In the short term, suspension, exclusion and absence figures may fall, but it is not a sustainable solution.

## Reintegration

Successful reintegration can be difficult even in schools where internal alternative provision is working well. Although some pupils may need more than one placement, when this happens too often it impacts capacity and can be demoralising for the pupil, making it harder to break unhelpful patterns. Common challenges include:

- Lack of staff capacity to support pupils during the transition process.
  - Mainstream staff not being receptive to pupils, or not having the skills.
  - Reintegration happens too quickly, or too slowly.
- These challenges have been overcome through:
- Strong communication with mainstream staff.
  - Training for mainstream staff to equip them with necessary skills e.g. de-escalation, restorative conversations, chunking instructions and tasks.
  - Gradual and responsive reintegration which goes at the pupil's pace.
  - Use of mainstream inclusion/support staff and services.
  - Follow up monitoring – supportive '*watching from a distance*' (staff, South East)
  - '*After care*' (staff, North West) support which communicates that the pupil is still held in mind by staff who know and care about them.

### CASE STUDY FOUR: Oakmeadow primary school, Shropshire

Oakmeadow is a large primary school in rural Shropshire which has worked hard on whole-school inclusion. This extends to their Trust's leadership team, whose inclusion lead participated in The Difference's Inclusive Leadership Course. The Nurture Space is an embedded internal alternative provision which opens three afternoons a week for up to eight children from KS1 and KS2 to develop social and emotional skills. It is staffed by a Nurture trained Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HTLA) and teacher. The children spend the rest of the week in their regular classrooms.

Referral involves the SEN Lead (who is also the Deputy Head), the Internal Alternative Provision Lead (who is also the safeguarding lead) and class teachers, and draws on pastoral, academic, behaviour, SEN and safeguarding data. At the start of what is often a 12-week placement, staff complete a Boxall profile to identify personal targets for each child. These targets shape carefully planned afternoon sessions in Nurture, where children share a story and group activity (thematically linked to the curriculum), are supported with meaningful free choice play, and share snack time where they further practice turn-taking and social skills. The staff keep records about how each child develops, and set new targets as appropriate. Progress is formally reviewed every six weeks and informs the timing and process of reintegration. Outcomes are measured at pupil level and rates of successful reintegration are tracked.

“The progress that she made over the year during Nurture had a massive impact on her outcomes in the classroom. She had friends. She wanted to go outside and play because children wanted to go and play with her. And emotionally that has a massive impact on how she feels about herself and her self-esteem. Because of that she was able to concentrate better in the classroom and produce work.

Staff

*continued...*

“Once they start enjoying coming in and knowing somebody cares about them, they’ll want to do that again and again rather than not wanting to come to school.

Staff

The Nurture space is also open every morning to provide a ‘soft start’ for up to 12 children who are finding the regular start of the day difficult. There is overlap with the children who attend the Nurture afternoons. However, there are additional places for children who need a soft start but not a full Nurture placement. This enables the Nurture space to benefit more pupils and therefore make a bigger contribution to whole school inclusion.

Larry, a Year 2 child, was referred to Nurture because he was frequently becoming dysregulated and distressed which was affecting his interaction with peers and engagement with learning. The Nurture placement supported him to express emotions, interact positively with other children, develop confidence and ignite a love for reading. When asked what he likes doing at school, he said:

*Learning, and it’s good because I get to do it all the time.*

Larry needed a second term of Nurture provision and staff were unsure how he would react to a new cohort of children. They were delighted when he readily responded to being given a leadership role and was instrumental in welcoming the new children and helping them to settle in. During this second term he began to reduce his time in Nurture, from three, to two, to finally one afternoon per week. Close communication with his class teacher and TA supported this reintegration and allowed him to develop strong relationships with these adults who reinforced learning through their language and manner, enabling him to continue to progress in the mainstream setting:

*Even though I’m not with him, I check in on him and make a fuss of him to make him know that I’m still there and he doesn’t need [a TA] sat next to him all the time.*

The joined-up approach to whole school inclusion, which promotes dialogue between Nurture and mainstream staff, is key to this success story, as is the way that measurable pupil outcomes shape the provision: it is explicitly designed to support the development of social and emotional skills, engagement with learning, wellbeing and successful reintegration.

## TENET FOUR

Effective internal alternative provision is shaped by measurable pupil outcomes

### Key takeaways

- The internal alternative provision should be designed with the pupils’ best interests at the forefront.
- An effective internal alternative provision results in measurable pupil outcomes which benefit both the individual and the school community.
- Transition should be planned and supported, whether this is back to mainstream lessons or onward to another setting or pathway.

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