DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Education Strategy Group

Darlington Alternative Education Framework

Quality Assurance Protocol

Reviewed February 2024 – Final Website Version 15 March 2024

(This protocol is one within a series of protocols and should not be considered in isolation. Protocols may be reviewed and subject to change)

Section 1 – Introduction and Expectations

1.1 What is Alternative Provision?

Alternative Provision (AP) is defined as *'education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive a 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'. (DfE January 2013[1]).*

Schools can use such provision to try to prevent exclusions, or to re-engage pupils in their education. Pupil referral units are themselves a form of AP, but many pupils who are on the roll of a pupil referral unit also attend additional forms of AP off-site.

AP is provided through full or part-time, and short or longer-term placements. Placements can be delivered by AP academies, AP free providers and pupil referral units (PRUs). Other schools also provide AP, including further education colleges, independent providers, and other providers from the private and voluntary sectors, which may or may not be registered as an independent school (see Appendix 1 for guidance).

1.2 What is Good Alternative Provision?

> *"High quality AP creates additional capacity for mainstream school leaders and staff to address challenging behaviour earlier and re-engage pupils in education."[2]*

Alternative Education providers should have a clear purpose with a focus on education and achievement as well as meeting the pupil's needs and rigorous assessment of progress. Providers should offer appropriate and challenging teaching (unless it is being provided elsewhere within a package of provision), be suited to the pupils' capabilities, give pupils the opportunity to take appropriate qualifications, and have good arrangements for working with other relevant services.

Common elements[3] that AP should aim to achieve include:

- good academic attainment on a par with mainstream schools – particularly in English, maths, and science (including IT) – with appropriate accreditation and qualifications;
- that the specific personal, social, and academic needs of pupils are properly identified and met to help them to overcome any barriers to attainment;
- 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.

1.3 School Responsibilities

As a commissioner, the responsibility for quality assurance and evaluation of AP sits with the school. Schools should have an AP policy which will set out the school objectives, outlining:

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[1] The main legislation covering the duties and powers relating to these issues are listed in the 'Alternative Provision' statutory guidance for Local Authorities', https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision

[2] *SEND and AP improvement plan March 2023* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan

[3] Para 30 of alternative provision statutory guidance https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942014/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_accessible.pdf

a) how AP fits in with the curriculum
b) reasons why pupils may be offered a part time AP placement and ensure the right pupils are identified
c) the referral process to AP
d) the procedures in place for monitoring attendance, safeguarding, pupil progress, behaviour and welfare of all pupils attending an AP
e) Othe procedures for monitoring and evaluating the impact of AP

It is expected that the school maintains on-going contact with the provider and the pupil, with clear procedures in place to exchange information, monitor progress and provide pastoral support. The statutory guidance[4] (also see Appendix 3), sets out expectations that a school should set objectives and timeframes with appropriate monitoring of progress and reviews.

1.4 The Darlington Alternative Education Framework

Schools as commissioners need the right information to be able to decide which provision is most appropriate for a pupil.

A local directory or framework of provision, has been developed to help schools source AP. The Framework can be found on the Darlington Borough Council website: https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/alternative-provision/darlington-alternative-education-framework/

> *This is <u>not </u>an approved list of providers; instead it offers providers who have met the Framework of minimum standards around the safety and legality of provisions to ensure that only provision meeting these standards will be listed.*

The standards include safeguarding, health and safety (see 1.5 below), quality of accommodation, quality of education. They are clearly defined in the DfE statutory guidelines, including where registration is necessary, and are listed in the annual audit of compulsory policies (see Appendix 2).

The Framework is a helpful starting point. However, prior to placement, schools should still assess whether the provision offers high quality education and is suitable for the pupil's individual needs. Schools may commission AP from providers that are not part of the Framework, but this is unusual. See additional guidance – school checklist when choosing alternative provision.

The Framework is specifically for use by schools in Darlington and therefore operates within this prescribed remit and completely independently to any other commissioning activity. As this contracting arrangement operates on a non-exclusive basis, providers operating on the Framework may also provide services through other contracting arrangements to meet broader commissioning requirements including, but not limited to, children's social care commissioning and SEND commissioning. For the avoidance of doubt, the Framework does not cover provision currently provided by, or co-ordinated through the local authority's Pupil Referral Unit and the Home and Hospital Teaching Service. The following provisions are also outside of the scope of the Framework.

- Any form of regulated residential provision including short breaks (both within the borough of Darlington and out of the authority)
- Post compulsory educational provision for 16–19-year-olds

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[4] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942014/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_accessible.pdf

1.5 Health & Safety and Safeguarding Checks

Where the alternative provider is part of, or has requested inclusion on, the Alternative Education Framework, the local authority Lead Inclusion Officer will carry out a health & safety and safeguarding site visit, an employer and public liability insurance check, a check of the Single Central Record and a check of the details of the Designated Safeguarding Officer and Health & Safety Officer. The Vulnerable Pupil Panel are informed once providers are approved. Health and Safety and Safeguarding checks are repeated annually and feedback on audits completed is provided to the Vulnerable Pupil Panel.

Section 2 – Strategic Planning of AP

> *The purpose of this protocol is to produce a straight-forward, effective quality assurance system which can be used by schools and providers alike, to support quality placements and support strategic plans for AP.*

2.1 Introduction

This quality protocol supports school's own systems and sets out the roles and responsibilities of schools and providers in the identification of how AP meet pupil's needs. The protocol ensures a framework in which to commission and monitor pupil placements. This is set out in the 'placement flowchart' (please refer to section 3).

When elements of pupils' programmes are being delivered elsewhere, schools will have confidence in the quality of the teaching and learning experience at the provider and ensure that schools have an audit trail to demonstrate intent and impact of the use of AP.

It sets out the process through which the local authority will assure that placements continue to be of high quality and meet the needs of the pupils. It will support the evaluation of the academic, personal and social progress being made by all pupils who attend AP, ensuring that the targets set for academic progress are suitably challenging.

Providers will also have systems in place which allow them to assess their own performance, although indicators of quality tend to vary in style and detail from place to place. It therefore promotes a consistent approach for APs to use.

The quality assurance monitoring will inform strategic plans for AP, including how partners ensure that they have the right type, quantity and range of AP to meet children and young people's needs.

This protocol applies to all types of AP as defined in the statutory guidance for AP and outreach services that include local alternative providers or local authority teams that support mainstream schools to improve behaviour or attendance.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

> **"AP is an intervention not a destination"[5]**

All pupils should be helped and encouraged to achieve or exceed the standards of a good education. Where schools recognise any issues or barriers, and hence a potential requirement for AP at an early stage, this can deal with needs in a timely manner and reduce preventable exclusion.

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[5] *SEND and AP improvement plan March 2023* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan

2.3 Key Principles

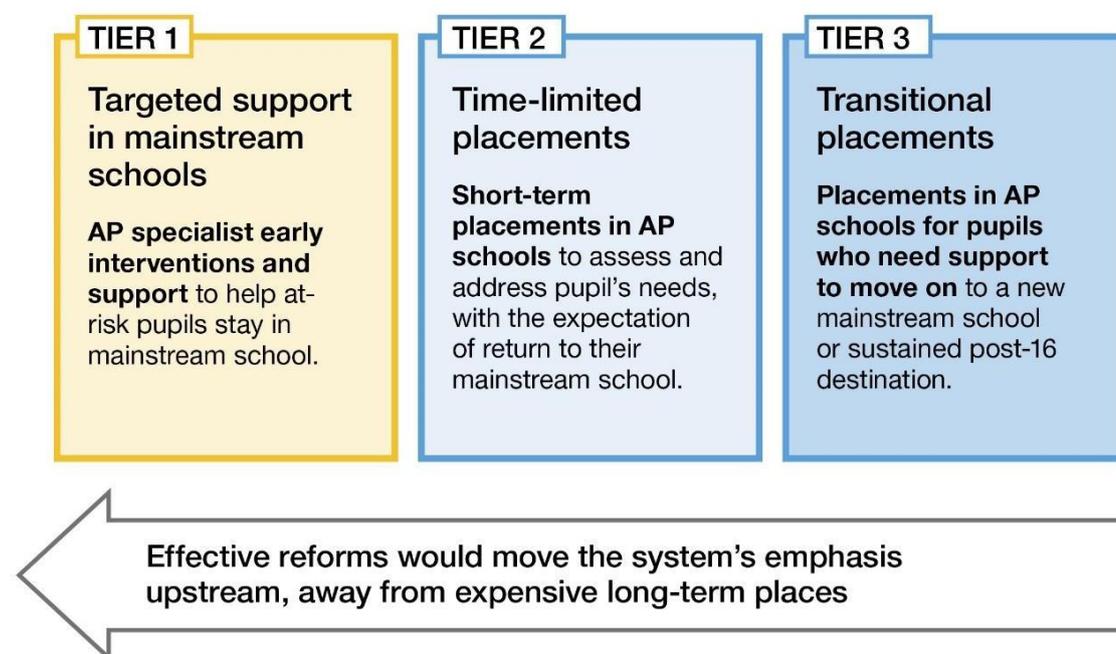The quality assurance protocol is based on the key principles outlined below. These are:

a.   **Early Intervention**

Early intervention focuses on the early assessment and identification of a pupil's needs before a pupil's behaviour has deteriorated to the extent that exclusion is the only option.

This is supportive of the integrated SEND and AP system 'three tier' model approach, as set out in the SEND and AP improvement plan, March 2023**, which aims to move the system's emphasis upstream, away from long-term places.** See figure 1 below:

Figure 1:

A three-tier model for alternative provision

TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
Targeted support in mainstream schools	**Time-limited placements**	**Transitional placements**
AP specialist early interventions and support to help at-risk pupils stay in mainstream school.	**Short-term placements in AP schools** to assess and address pupil's needs, with the expectation of return to their mainstream school.	**Placements in AP schools for pupils who need support to move on** to a new mainstream school or sustained post-16 destination.

Effective reforms would move the system's emphasis upstream, away from expensive long-term places

b.   **Successful transitions and preparation for adulthood**

Planning for the end of a placement begins at the outset, with a focus on a pupil's progression back into mainstream education. Time-limited or transitional placements into AP can provide more intensive intervention or longer-term support before pupils return to their mainstream school, a new school, or progress to a sustainable post-16 destination. Having smooth transitions and high aspirations for pupils in AP supports children and young people to fulfil their potential.

c.   **Safeguarding**

To strengthen protections for children and young people in unregistered provision, the quality assurance protocol ensures that every placement is safe and has clear oversight which is backed up by strong attendance management systems, safeguarding controls and support from local authority officers

d. Partnership Working

The AP cohort often have significant needs as well as an increased vulnerability. This includes pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). Collaborative professional communities are needed to safeguard and educate young people. All partners working collaboratively using this quality assurance protocol supports the LA statutory duty to identify and track pupils at risk of missing education, which includes children who are not attending school provision full time and those accessing AP.

Schools provide the local authority with data on all pupils attending AP and/or on a part time timetable. This provides rigorous oversight of pupil placements and informs local leaders' strategic decision making. Through this central database and monitoring of the quality and amount of provision, the LA ensures it has control measures in place and can analyse the impact AP is having on pupils' education.

e. Curriculum – Strategic Intent

The quality assurance protocol will ensure that placements are clearly connected to the school curriculum with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy development. Where appropriate, courses should lead to accredited qualifications. Schools as commissioners will set appropriate targets at the referral stage to enable effective monitoring throughout and post placement. A robust referral process increases understanding of pupils' backgrounds and needs, supports decision making and facilitates the development of positive relationships.

f. Home and Family Engagement

The initial stage of engagement with home and family is the most important time to engage parents and pupils who often share feelings of anxiety and stigma prior to starting in AP. This can intensify and compound existing issues and barriers these families may be experiencing. The quality assurance protocol values the importance of engagement at the initial stages to counter negative perceptions. It can also increase consistency of expectations, values and aspirations.

2.4 Governance

Oversight of the key performance indicators as set out in the Thematic reviews of AP in local areas guidance[6] will be through Darlington's Education Strategy Group (ESG) which provides overall strategic direction to educational partnership activity across Darlington. The ESG works with the Primary Headteachers Forum, the 11-19 Partnership, Vulnerable Pupil Panel (VPP) and other partnership groups. It provides overall strategic direction for identified partnership work programmes and funded projects.

The VPP is a partnership of Darlington settings that examines service delivery and options for provisions and promotes multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working where appropriate. Schools which have any pupil off site complete an Alternative Education and reduced timetable return reportable to the VPP, which allows the local authority to identify placements and arrange quality assurance monitoring visits (see section 3).

Settings provide information as a minimum on the following:

- Pupils attending AP or receiving AP outreach services
- Pupils who have stopped receiving AP in the previous 6 months
- Pupils who are on the roll of an AP but are not attending

It can also include where pupils are in unregistered provision, out-of-area and in dual-registered placements and on part time timetables. Overall impact can be measured in a variety of ways, including the use of monitoring visits which consist of learning walk reports. Impact can also be ascertained by using pupil voice and focus groups, as well as parental feedback and annual report summaries from providers.

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[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thematic-reviews-of-alternative-provision-in-local-areas/thematic-reviews-of-alternative-provision-in-local-areas

2.5 Quality Outcomes

The protocol requires that both quality outcome and individual learning targets are set. This will include pupil attendance, retention, engagement, behaviour and progress towards qualification and assessment results (where relevant).

- **Attendance -** When pupils are travelling to different providers for part of their programme, it is particularly important to track their attendance to ensure that it is at least as good as it is at the home school. Details of how this will take place will be agreed in the initial planning meeting.

- **Retention -** One of the indicators that the learning experience is good is the extent to which pupils remain in the placement as agreed. It can be particularly problematic for a school if a young person in Year 10 or 11 is, for whatever reason, taken off a course once it has started.

  - Termly and cumulative retention data is produced for each course or placement by the Provider lead.

  - If a retention issue appears to be arising during the placement, it is investigated by the Provider lead and a report is produced for the Education Partnerships Officer.

- **Assessment results and learner progress -** All schools analyse and report on external examination results. It is important that the same applies to AP so that retrospective judgements can be made on performance. This may be helpful in determining future provision, delivery arrangements and action planning. Whilst there can be no doubting the importance of 'raw' examination results, they do not necessarily reflect the distance travelled by pupils during the placement. Learner progress is also important.

- **Engagement and behaviour** will be tracked and reported through the pre and post pupil strength and development questionnaire as well as through the pupil voice teaching and learning questionnaire.

Section 3 - The Placement Process (School Led)

3.1 Overview of Process

The process flowchart (see Annex 1) sets out the key steps from pre-commissioning to post-placement.

The school will complete an initial referral form, conduct an initial meeting, and complete the individual AP placement agreement with the provider. The school and provider will work together to track progress as a minimum half termly.

The school will also administer a termly pupil voice teaching and learning questionnaire for **each pupil placement** as it is important to review the pupil's experience at the provider. This will be completed anonymously and returned to the LA.

To evaluate the intervention and to assess impact, at induction and at the end of the placement the school will complete a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) with the pupil which will baseline their personal development targets as well as social, emotional learning, resilience, engagement and confidence. The questionnaire can be completed termly but should be completed at the end of the placement and results should be reported on the VPP data report.

The SDQ can be completed independently by the school but is an approach for all schools in Darlington to use to ensure reporting on pupil impact is consistent.

3.2 Placement Process Step by Step

The Initial Referral

To establish good communication between the home school and provider, there will be an initial referral by the school using the AP referral form. This will include an initial assessment of the current levels at which the pupil is working plus an assessment of their current wellbeing. This will ensure that the school considers the pupil's learning objectives and produces a baseline assessment prior to placement to set meaningful objectives.

Initial Meeting

The school will arrange a planning meeting with staff from the two organisations which will take place **before the pupil accesses the provision**.

It will cover elements such as contact details of named individuals within both organisations, safeguarding, attendance and absentee chasing arrangements, and the individual AP placement agreement will be developed. This will include an agreement of the current levels at which the pupil is working plus an agreement of their objectives, including personal development objectives.

Individual AP Placement Agreement

Based on agreements from the initial referral and meeting, the school will complete the placement agreement which is then signed by both parties.

Induction

The provider may be asked to produce evidence that a full induction has been completed. The checklist from the Induction Protocol should be completed.

Pupil Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

The school should complete the student strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) at the start of the placement to baseline their personal development targets as well as social, emotional learning targets, resilience, engagement and confidence.

3.3 Monitoring

The home school should track progress on pupil attendance, engagement, behaviour and progress towards qualification / outcomes where relevant and use this to report to Governors on a half termly basis as a minimum. Data returned to VPP may be used to track progress of vulnerable cohorts.

Through regular monitoring, the home school should be confident that if there are any unsatisfactory issues, these will be recognised promptly and that appropriate, decisive action will be taken.

Concerns would be raised, and appropriate recommendations made as appropriate e.g. to a school's DSL, through referral to LADO. The Lead Inclusion Officer will provide further support where required and if appropriate, feedback will be given to pupils by the provider lead.

For further safeguarding advice and guidance see the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership website: https://www.darlington-safeguarding-partnership.co.uk/.

See section 4 respecting the arrangements for monitoring Alternative Education Providers.

3.4 Vulnerable Pupil Panel Reporting

Schools having any pupil off site must complete an alternative education return (which also requires information on reduced timetables) for the local authority to arrange monitoring visits to support the quality assurance protocol.

At the completion of a placement, the school provides data on post-placement impact by providing detail relating to:

- Destination following placement
- Progress regardless of attainment
- Attitude to learning

Section 4 – Alternative Education Providers – Quality Assurance (LA Led)

4.1 Provider Quality Monitoring Visits

All alternative education providers used by schools in Darlington, have their provision monitored by means of visits from school leads organised by the Local Authority. Visits should normally take place in the Autumn term (November) and Spring term and subject to staff capacity and pupil year groups, could take place in the Summer term.

Key areas of discussion within the quality monitoring visits will include, by means of professional discussion and learning walk:

- safeguarding
- evidence of curriculum
- consideration of progress and improvement to pupil/adult relationships
- enquiry based approach to review compliance to protocol – (are there areas for development that can be worked on collaboratively with the partnership?)
- agreement of actions for development/identification of training needs either for provider or partnership or both

The Provider quality monitoring visit form will ensure professional discussion and includes opportunities to acknowledge and record good practice as well as agreeing actions for areas for development. Actions will be agreed by both parties and copied to the local authority.

Visits should be conducted by suitably qualified staff.

4.2 The Pupil Voice - Teaching and Learning Questionnaire

It is important to know what pupils think of their learning experience. This seems to be especially so when pupils from one school are taking part of their programme elsewhere. The headteacher of the home school needs to know the extent to which pupils rate that part of their experience which is being provided by a provider; equally, the leader of the provider needs to know what pupils might be saying about the experience when they return to their home school.

Schools may also choose to use their own pupil voice method however the pupil voice teaching and learning questionnaire is to be used during the school monitoring visits. It is the **home school's responsibility, liaising with the provider, to ensure pupil voice is completed by all pupils in their commissioned AP.** The use of the teaching and learning questionnaire is intended to give an early indication of pupil views so if there are any issues they can be dealt with before it is too late. If there are issues arising from the pupil responses, they will be addressed by the relevant provider lead. Whilst questionnaires are anonymous, the school undertaking the monitoring visits will ensure concerns are raised immediately with the local authority.

Questionnaires will be administered independently and professionally. Those responsible at the provider for this activity will give clear instructions to ensure the questionnaires are completed in a mature, sensible, and thoughtful manner. This is intended to ensure that pupils understand the importance of the activity and that they answer honestly and with integrity, without fear of the consequences. The course teacher / tutor will not be present when pupils are giving their responses. Where pupils have low literacy skills, the questionnaire can be administered verbally with the pupils.

Providers will keep copies of the questionnaires to ensure they can address any issues arising from the pupil responses. It is good practice to feed back to pupils.

4.3 Strengths and Development Questionnaire

At the start and conclusion of the placement, the school will ensure the pupil completes the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ), and parent views can also be sought. An overall outcome on pupil's strengths and difficulties (where improved, no change or worse), is to be reported on the VPP report when the placement has concluded.

4.4 Provider's Annual Quality Assurance Reports

It is important for all concerned that there is openness and transparency in quality assurance reporting. Annual provider quality assurance reports and action plans (if appropriate) are produced in the Autumn term each year by the AP Lead with professional support from the Education Partnerships Officer. The reports include coverage of the key quality indicators including attendance, retention, and achievement. The reports will be accepted by the Education Strategy Group during the Autumn term following the completion of the academic year to which the report relates. The reports will then be made available to members of the Vulnerable Pupil Panel.

To ensure a successful annual report the Provider should ensure the following:

- At the end of the course or placement, examination results or outcomes are analysed indicating the numbers and percentages passing the course and achieving the different grades, or numbers of pupils meeting placement outcomes

- The analysis includes reference to benchmark data, particularly national averages where they are available. It also includes progression data, where appropriate.

- Any interim results from individual units/modules will be analysed to ensure that performance is in line with expectation. If issues are evident, an appropriate action plan will be developed and implemented.

- Where appropriate, each pupil will have a target grade or agreed outcomes as set out in the referral form and agreed in the placement agreement.

- Whilst pupils will be aware of their learning targets, they should, as part of the monitoring and tracking, be set targets which stretch them rather than allow them to coast.

4.5 Provider's Annual Audits

Audits will take place annually on or around the anniversary date of the provider's initial application audit check, or within a reasonable period. Where providers do not provide a planned check date, despite requests, it may be necessary to remove the provider from the catalogue.

Appendix 1 - Definitions

Unregistered Alternative Provision

Providers must ensure that they are compliant with the most recent DfE guidance around legislation and the definition of an independent school. Providers must register as an independent school if they meet any of the criteria below. Full guidance is at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-school-registration

An independent school is defined as any school at which full-time education is provided for five or more pupils of compulsory school age, or for one or more such pupils with an EHC plan or who is "looked after" by a local authority and is not a school maintained by a local authority or a non-maintained special school. A child is "looked after by a local authority" if he or she is in its care or is provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours by the authority under its social services functions (see section 22 of the Children Act 1989 and section 74 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014).

If an establishment falls outside the definition of an independent school given above, it cannot be registered with the department as an independent school. However, local authorities will need to be satisfied that children of compulsory school age who are attending the establishment are receiving full-time education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have, including any provision being made in parallel to that in the establishment. It is an offence to conduct an unregistered independent school, and anyone who does so is liable on summary conviction to a fine and/or imprisonment.

Full-time Education

There is no legal definition of what constitutes 'full-time' education. However, we would consider an institution to be providing full-time education if it is intended to provide, or does provide, all, or substantially all, of a child's education.

Relevant factors in determining whether education is full-time include:

> a) the number of hours per week that is provided - including breaks and independent study time;
> b) the number of weeks in the academic term/year the education is provided;
> c) the time of day it is provided;
> d) whether the education provision in practice precludes the possibility that full-time education could be provided elsewhere.

Generally, we consider any institution that is operating during the day, for more than 18 hours per week, to be providing full-time education. This is because the education being provided is taking up the substantial part of the week in which it can be reasonably expected a child can be educated, and therefore indicates that the education provided is the main source of education for that child.

Appendix 2 – Minimum Alternative Provider Standards

DBC Alternative Education Provision (AEP)
Framework Statement and Evidence 2023/2024

(subject to change – as at September 2023)

The documents listed below are required to meet the Darlington AEP Framework of minimum standards to be listed in the DBC Alternative Education Provision Framework Directory:

Policy Documents
Compulsory
- Safeguarding Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

Discretionary (If appropriate to your setting)
- Admissions Policy
- Attendance Procedures
- Behaviour/Anti Bullying Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Educational Visits
- E-Safety/Media Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Fire Policy
- GDPR
- Medication Policy
- Lone Working Policy
- Physical Restraint Policy
- Safer Recruitment Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Whistle blowing Policy

- **Insurance Documents (Essential)**
  - Employers Liability
  - Public Liability

- **Fire Safety Inspection Report**

- **First Aid Certificate of Staff (required every 3 years)**

- **Lead Safeguarding Training Certificate (required every 2 years)**

- **Single Central Record of Staff & Volunteers (Compulsory)**
  - DBS details
  - Identity checks
  - Right to work in UK
  - Qualified Teaching Status (barred checks)

- **Site Risk Assessments (Essential)**
  - General Risk Assessment
  - Activities Risk Assessment
  - Covid-19 (if applicable at time of assessment)

- **Restrictive Physical Intervention** (if appropriate to your setting)**:**
  - RPI Certificates & Insurance

Appendix 3 – Schools Responsibilities Statutory Guidance

When a pupil is directed off site for education, the school has a statutory duty to agree and set out objectives and timeframes with appropriate monitoring of progress and reviews. This should include how often the placement will be reviewed, when the first review will be and who should be involved in the reviews.

The school should also plan for the pupil's reintegration into the school or if the placement does not end with reintegration into the school – for example, when a pupil reaches the end of Y11 while still in AP – the school should work with the provider to ensure that the young person can move on into suitable education or employment alongside part-time study or training. The school should collect and record information about the pupil's next destination as part of its planning for AP intervention.

The Ofsted report published in February 2016[7] can also provide guidance.

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[7]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500918/Alternative_provision_findings_from_Ofsteds_threeyear_survey_of_schools_use_of_off-site_alternative_provision.pdf

Annex A Related Documents

All documents referred to in this protocol can be found on the Darlington Borough Council website:

https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/alternative-provision/

Or on request from AP@darlington.gov.uk