

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: ALTERNATIVE PROVISION (AP)

Date Considered: 3 December 2024

1. In February 2024, when the subject of AP was last discussed at select committee, 23 per cent of these children and young people (CYP) receiving alternative provision were receiving at least the 15-hour minimum a week education set by the Department for Education. Eight months later, this had risen to 45 per cent. The Committee was informed there had been a focus on reviewing individual support packages to ensure referrals met the minimum 15-hour threshold, and regular reviews were conducted for children who received less due to their complex needs.
2. Members recognised there had been good progress in increasing the number of hours of AP provided; however, given the majority still received fewer than 15 hours a week, they remained concerned about whether children and young people were able to access it. Members receive frequent correspondence from parents stating how difficult AP is to access, how long CYP have to wait for it, and how little information is available. The Committee asked whether schools, parents, officers, and other stakeholders had a clear understanding of what AP was, its objectives, and when it should be used. They were told the Service was developing documents for families and schools to improve clarity on roles, responsibilities and purpose. The Committee is concerned that some policy and guidance information has taken a very long time to deliver and some is not yet published. It is almost a year since the Select Committee endorsed Family Voice Surrey's recommendation to provide a Parent Handbook on AP and this has not yet been issued.
3. Members queried whether both outcomes and quality of provision - whether provided by schools or SCC - were monitored robustly. There was also concern about the level of severely absent, given the potential safeguarding implications and that a comparison between the severely absent cohort against the total year 11 cohort showed a higher percentage going on to become Not in Education, Employment or Training, as well as a notably higher proportion whose current situation remained unknown.

Recommendations

The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee notes the significant improvement between February 2024 and October 2024 in the number of children and young people receiving 15 or more hours of education each week. It is encouraged by the Service's increased focus and attention on children not in school and applauds the efforts so far to ensure that this easily forgotten cohort is not neglected.

The Committee recommends that the CFLL Service:

- I. Prioritises achieving the target of 15 hours a week for all Children and Young People, except those who have complex medical or mental health needs that mean they can cope only with fewer hours.
- II. Delivers a strategy and plan to assess the quality of Alternative Provision provided based on whether the provision is meeting the needs of the CYP receiving it and enabling the CYP to return to full-time education or appropriate alternative employment/training.
- III. Considers – with safeguarding partners – how children not in school (and not just those who are electively home educated) could be better safeguarded. The Committee remains concerned that this sizeable cohort of children are particularly vulnerable and the issue warrants increased attention.
- IV. Works with schools to understand why 2,303 children and young people are missing more than half of the school year, and how this number can be reduced - particularly the 514 severely absent pupils with an EHCP in mainstream, given the SCC strategy of ensuring more children with EHCPs are educated in mainstream environments.
- V. Presents to the Select Committee the findings of the Surrey Virtual School review into 'suitable education', which was due to go to the education subgroup of the Corporate Parenting Board in November 2024.

**Fiona Davidson, Chair - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture
Select Committee**

Background papers

[Report to Children, Families, Lifelong Learning Select Committee 3 December 2024, Item 9](#)

[Draft minutes of Children, Families, Lifelong Learning Select Committee 3 December 2024](#)