



IntegratED

Alternative Provision Quality Benchmark Toolkit

Summary

About IntegratED

IntegratED is a coalition of partner organisations working to reduce preventable exclusions and improve the quality of education for children excluded from school. We do this through a whole-child development lens.

It is our belief that all young people should leave school with the skills, values, aptitudes and capabilities necessary to realise their full potential and contribute to the common good.

We are working across the education, charity, and policy sectors, training teachers, trialling interventions and conducting research in order to achieve long-term systemic change. Our partners are:



IntegratED AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit 2021

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Introduction

Pupils in alternative provision (AP) are amongst those with the highest levels of need and most significant vulnerabilities in the country.

At present, there is no consensus on the characteristics of good quality AP or on the best ways to measure it. The significant scale and variety of pupils' needs mean that the traditional barometers used to measure pupil success and school performance are unsuitable. Collectively, the education system must ensure that all pupils develop academically, personally, socially and emotionally so that they can be successful both at school and beyond.

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This project seeks to establish what appropriate and effective education means for these pupils, by addressing the crucial question of: *'What are the characteristics of good quality AP?'*

Over the last 12 months, The Centre for Social Justice – as part of the IntegratED partnership – has been exploring the issue of quality AP quality across England. Our research identified a strong desire from the government¹ and professionals within the sector for a robust comprehensive methodology by which to evaluate AP quality.

We have engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders to identify the key challenges associated with understanding AP quality and to develop a solution that will:

- Identify and facilitate the sharing of good practice
- Integrate with existing DfE guidance and the current Ofsted inspection framework
- Take into consideration the varied purposes of different AP settings
- Support schools and local authorities to make decisions that are in the best interests of their pupils
- Lead to improvements in AP quality locally and nationally

This document includes a summary of our research project and provides interested parties with the opportunity to engage with our work.

1. DfE, 2018. Government response to the Education Select Committee's fifth report of Session 2017-19 on alternative provision.

Who have we engaged with?

To date, to ensure that our findings are informed by practice and representative of the needs and challenges of the sector, we have engaged and consulted with the following individuals and organisations:

ACE Schools	Olive Academies
AP Challenge Trust	Patricia Thomson, University of Nottingham
AP Data Pioneers	Pendlebury Centre PRU
Aspire AP	Pivot Academy
Blackpool Council	PRUsAP Network
Bradford AP Academy	Relationships Foundation
Cape Mentors	Right to Succeed
Chessbrook Education Support Centre	River Tees Multi-Academy Trust
City of Birmingham School	Social Finance
CP Riverside School	Solihull Academy
Educational Diversity	TBAP
FFT Education Datalab	The Academy of Central Bedfordshire
Hartley Lloyd Pack, Hackney Education	The AP Research Network
Haybrook College	The Difference
John Bradshaw OBE	The Pears Family School
Learn Sheffield	The Rowans AP Academy
Leeds Beckett University	The RSA
London East Alternative Provision	The Skylark Partnership Trust
New River College family of PRUs	Transforming Lives for Good (TLG)
New Schools Network	Wave Multi-Academy Trust
Newham PRUs	Westside School

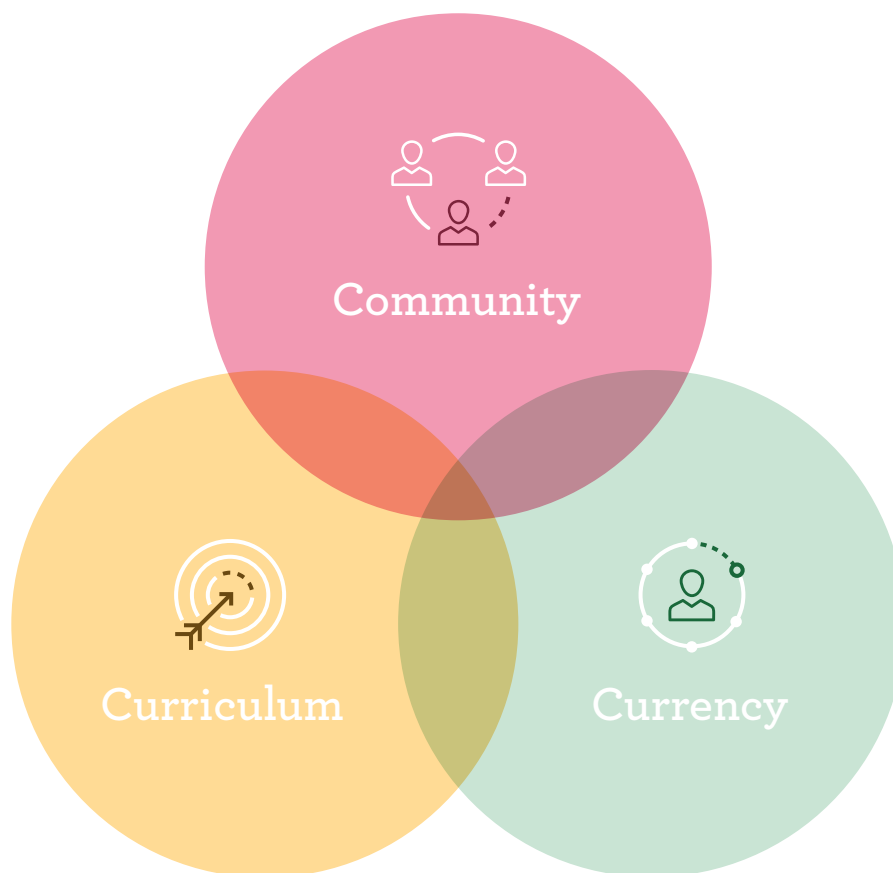
What is the solution?

We analysed a variety of approaches to AP improvement, including performance measures, league tables and contextualised comparisons.

Although these approaches may at first glance seem intuitive, closer scrutiny exposes significant flaws. As our forthcoming report highlights, a reform package that relies on these measures would, in all likelihood, fail to catalyse meaningful improvement. Most notably, our research shows that these metrics are too narrowly focused on traditional performance indicators and fail to capture the reality of effective support in context. There is a strong risk that relying on these measures would, therefore, lead to changes in practice that would compromise the quality of education

AP pupils receive – and in doing so would further disadvantage an already vulnerable cohort.

In response to this, we have developed **The AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit**. It codifies AP quality, enables effectiveness to be evaluated and takes a comprehensive and holistic approach to improvement. The toolkit includes a range of quality benchmarks across three categories: Community, Curriculum and Currency.



Community recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

Curriculum accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Currency focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

The AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit



Community

1. Workforce development and wellbeing
2. Home and family engagement
3. Partnership working:
 - a) Local authority
 - b) Mainstream schools
 - c) External alternative providers
 - d) Other agencies
4. Research and innovation



Curriculum

5. Pupil induction
6. Attendance and engagement
7. Supporting pupils' needs:
 - a) Literacy
 - b) Special educational needs and disability (SEND)
 - c) Health and wellbeing
8. Quality of education



Currency

9. Personal development
10. Qualifications
11. Assessment of need
12. Appropriate transition:
 - a) Mainstream school
 - b) Other Alternative Provision
 - c) Specialist provision
13. Post-16 destinations



Community

Recognises that AP schools and providers are part of the wider educational eco-system that safeguards and supports pupils. Strong relationships and effective partnerships are crucial components of AP quality.

- 1. Workforce development and wellbeing.** Recruiting, retaining and developing high quality staff within a supportive school culture.
- 2. Home and family engagement.** Establishing strong relationships with parents and carers that support them and lead to improvements in pupil attendance and engagement, behaviour, learning and attainment.
- 3. Partnership working.** Safeguarding and meeting pupil needs through strategic partnership working with local authorities, mainstream schools, external AP providers and other agencies.
- 4. Research and innovation.** A commitment to continual development, innovation and the application of evidence-based practice, such as trauma-informed approaches for pupils who have Adverse Childhood Experiences.



Curriculum

Accounts for the support and education provided to pupils. It draws attention to aspects that are particularly pertinent for AP settings such as pupil induction, the quality of education as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

- 5. Pupil induction.** A robust induction process that increases understanding of pupils' backgrounds and needs, supports decision-making and facilitates the development of positive relationships.
- 6. Attendance and engagement.** The culture and systems of attendance and engagement that ensure high aspirations for pupils, timely interventions and sustained improvement over time.
- 7. Supporting pupils' needs.** Building relationships and understanding and adeptly supporting pupil needs including their literacy, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- 8. Quality of education.** A well-planned, broad, ambitious and tailored curriculum that enables pupils to learn, progress and develop in preparation for their next stage of education, employment or training.



Currency

Focuses on the outcomes and value gained by pupils in AP, including personal development, academic performance and successful transition to appropriate destinations.

- 9. Personal development.** The provision of opportunities and support to develop the behaviours, skills and character necessary for pupils' current and future success, including resilience, confidence, self-management and teamwork.
- 10. Qualifications.** Enabling all pupils to attain a broad, ambitious and valuable portfolio of qualifications.
- 11. Assessment of need.** Equipping pupils, parents/carers and future education professionals with the knowledge and understanding necessary to address pupils' needs at home and in future learning environments.
- 12. Appropriate transition.** Robust planning, communication and support that facilitates successful transitions to mainstream, other AP or specialist provision, when appropriate.
- 13. Post-16 destinations.** The preparation of pupils for their next steps after Year 11 including Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIAG), employability skills and transition support.

What are the features and benefits?

Improvement-oriented:

This toolkit can support leaders' pursuit of excellence as it promotes the sharing of effective practice and encourages continuous improvement. It facilitates a thorough evaluation of AP quality and is not a means by which to compare AP schools or achieve compliance with targets. Our research found that differences in purpose and function, the availability of resources, pupils' needs and placement lengths, as well as the respective operational scales of AP settings, mean that comparisons and the achievement of predetermined targets are inherently unreliable indicators of quality.

Comprehensive:

This toolkit provides a comprehensive overview of the core components of AP quality. This approach avoids placing disproportionate emphasis on any single aspect of AP practice or performance and has been developed with the knowledge that some aspects of AP education are not easily quantifiable with statistics. It includes aspects of AP quality and leadership that are sometimes overlooked, such as 'workforce development and wellbeing' as well as 'home and family engagement'.

Sector-led:

It has been developed in collaboration with AP school leaders and sector stakeholders from across the country. It includes the key areas and activities that high-quality AP schools and providers focus their energy and resources on.

Robust:

The benchmarks are also underpinned by a robust secondary research evidence base.

Evaluative:

This toolkit has been designed with the purpose of improving the quality of AP. It enables stakeholders such as school leaders and local authority teams to robustly evaluate effectiveness, determine their priorities and plan subsequent improvement activities.

Universal:

It recognises the nuances and intricacies within the AP sector and is suitable in all AP contexts. It is accommodating of the diverse functions and purposes of different AP settings. For example, it does not simply measure individual student-level outputs, which may be irrelevant in some contexts, such as post-16 destination figures. Instead, it includes such metrics as part of a thorough evaluation of the underlying substance and quality of education in AP.

Compatible:

It provides amplification to the key points made in Ofsted's school inspection handbook regarding the way in which the Education Inspection Framework applies in PRUs as well as in AP free schools and academies.

Flexible:

This toolkit approach offers more flexibility than comparative evaluative measures as it has the potential to stimulate robust evaluation whilst recognising the differences between AP settings. It can be used in a wide variety of scenarios – to evaluate a single AP, a group of providers or schools across a Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust, or to quality assure and support the development of new AP.

Concrete:

This toolkit provides a methodology to evaluate AP quality on national, local and individual levels. It provides a common language and vocabulary for conversations about AP quality.

How could this toolkit be used?

We believe that this toolkit can be used in a variety of ways across all levels of the education system to support the evaluation and improvement of AP quality. The table below outlines the rationale and ways in which it could be adopted and implemented.

Who?	What?	Why?
The Department for Education	<p>Roll out the AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit in a similar way to the Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Careers Guidance.</p> <p>For each of the benchmarks develop good practice resources to support schools and local authorities to improve.</p> <p>Use the AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit as the standard for AP quality, ensuring that future policies and guidance reflect the broad spectrum of activities and purposes of AP.</p>	<p>To increase understanding of the components of good quality AP.</p> <p>To ensure that all AP schools and providers are suitably supported to develop and maintain good practice that improves outcomes for pupils.</p> <p>To ensure that the varied needs of pupils in AP settings are considered and accounted for.</p>
Ofsted	<p>Incorporate the AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit into the AP inspector training module.</p> <p>Require all inspectors of AP schools to be trained in how to identify high-quality AP with reference to the AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit.</p>	<p>To increase inspectors' knowledge of the complexities and uniqueness of AP and develop their contextual understanding of AP quality.</p> <p>To enhance the way in which quality is identified and to improve the robustness of AP inspections.</p>
Local Authorities	<p>Use the toolkit to support the quality assurance of AP in their areas, including the evaluation and improvement of new and existing AP.</p>	<p>To support local authorities' awareness and understanding of AP quality in their area.</p> <p>To improve the breadth and depth of AP quality assurance.</p>
AP Schools and Providers	<p>Use the AP Quality Benchmark Toolkit to support self-evaluation and school improvement planning.</p>	<p>To improve outcomes for pupils through the identification of good practice and priorities for further development.</p>
Mainstream schools	<p>Use the toolkit when quality assuring and evaluating suitability for their pupils, both prior to commissioning and during their pupils' placements.</p>	<p>To ensure that all pupils are placed in high-quality AP, that can suitably meet their needs.</p>

What's next?

The report will launch later this year and will:

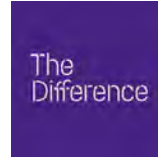
- Make the case for improvement in AP
- Advocate for a comprehensive approach to AP school and sector improvement
- Articulate the uniqueness of AP and the inherent issues with applying traditional performance measures to drive improvement
- Share research that substantiates the 13 benchmarks included within the toolkit
- Include case studies outlining good practice from across the sector
- Pose questions that will help leaders to evaluate performance across the benchmarks
- Make recommendations to Ofsted, DfE, Local Authorities and AP schools to implement the toolkit

Connect and Engage

1. Get connected IntegratED.org.uk
2. Follow us on Twitter: [@IntegratED_ed](https://twitter.com/IntegratED_ed)
3. Ask a question: dennis.simms@centreforsocialjustice.org.uk



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