

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Alternative provision](#), HC 342

Tuesday 6 March 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 6 March 2018.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; James Frith; Emma Hardy; Trudy Harrison; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell; Thelma Walker; Mr William Wragg.

Questions 114-220

Witnesses

I: Claire George, Head of Service, Peterborough Pupil Referral Service, Ralph Holloway, Transformation of SEN Service Manager, Essex County Council, and David Whitaker, Founding Member, Headteachers' Roundtable.

II: Colin Jeffrey, Fairbridge and Achieve Programme Manager, The Prince's Trust, Emma Bradshaw, Headteacher, The Limes College, Chaz Watson, Director, SILC Training, and Joanne Southby, Executive Head, London South East Academies Trust.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Peterborough Pupil Referral Service](#)
- [Essex County Council](#)
- [Headteachers' Roundtable](#)
- [The Prince's Trust](#)
- [The Limes College](#)
- [London South East Academies Trust](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Claire George, Ralph Holloway and David Whitaker.

Q114 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming today. For the benefit of the audience watching on the internet and everybody else, could you kindly give your names and positions?

Ralph Holloway: Ralph Holloway, SEN Transformation Manager at Essex County Council.

Claire George: Claire George. I am the Executive Headteacher of the Pupil Referral Service in Peterborough.

David Whitaker: Dave Whitaker, Executive Principal, Springwell Learning Community in Barnsley.

Q115 **Lucy Allan:** Good morning, and thank you very much for coming along today. I wanted to kick off by asking about the different perspectives of how children are referred into alternative provision and the different perspectives of the councils, the schools and the roles that they play, because it seems to me that it is quite fragmented. It is a bit inconsistent. Ralph, could you start with the perspective of the council and the roles councils play in the referral process?

Ralph Holloway: We are probably more involved in the reactive route into pupil referral, in that we get referrals from schools to the point of permanent exclusion. We might have had some involvement with that young person or we might not. It depends upon the individual school and the circumstances in which that young person was permanently excluded. We get a notification and within literally 24 hours we have to have that referral into one of our pupil referral units. Within six school days that young person will be starting their position with the PRU. There is not much room there for making an informed decision about what is the best provision for the young person.

Q116 **Lucy Allan:** Are you involved in making any assessment of the referral on its merits or looking into the background of the circumstances?

Ralph Holloway: Not at the point of permanent exclusion because we have a statutory duty to provide that education. At the point they enter the PRU we would expect those assessments to begin and we would work with our pupil referral units—some of which are local authority maintained, some of which are academies and some of which are free schools—to identify onward routes, but at the point of entry there is very little ability to influence the decision from the school.

Q117 **Lucy Allan:** If a child has been excluded, that is it, into the pupil referral unit, and you are not going to challenge that decision or ask, "Is this in the best interests of the child?" because you cannot—

Ralph Holloway: In some circumstances, we will have a direct conversation with the school, depending upon how much information we



have about the young person. There will be some circumstances in which we say to the school we think a managed move to another school would be in that young person's interests or, with additional support, we might maintain the place at the school. Again, it is entirely up to the headteacher of that school whether they are open to that conversation. We have behaviour and attendance partnerships that allow that conversation to take place before exclusion but when you have an exclusion on your desk in front of you, there is very little time for that to happen.

In terms of challenge, we have a clock ticking. We do not have the ability to challenge at the exclusion hearing itself. Local authorities are very much in the neutral position when it comes to the guidance around exclusion, so we are pretty much hidebound to say what the precedent might be in another school, and in some circumstances with academies, we don't even get the ability to attend those meetings.

The other type of referral route in is direct from the school to the pupil referral unit. We sit on the admissions panel for those referrals and we are able to have some influence over a common threshold across the local authority, so there is more control around that kind of route in than there is around the permanent exclusion route.

Q118 Lucy Allan: Is it fair to say, David, that it would depend on a headteacher's perspective on whether or not a child is referred rather than any kind of common procedure that is applied in all cases?

David Whitaker: I suppose it is a mixed view. Obviously, the initial referral out of the school is dependent on their teacher; but in Barnsley we have a triage process through the fair access protocol. Ultimately, if it is a permanent exclusion it is a permanent exclusion and nothing can be done about it at that point, but in Barnsley we have pre-exclusion—a preventative measure where headteachers will come together in a fair access meeting and discuss each individual case. There is almost a menu of interventions that need to have taken place before a child is seriously considered for a place in the pupil referral unit.

Q119 Lucy Allan: Claire, in your experience, is there a bit of handholding of teachers, where a teacher is concerned about whether or not a child is going to be excluded and you would give them some advice or help in making that decision, or are they just allowed to go, "I don't want this child in my school any more. You deal with it"?

Claire George: It is a bit of a myth that heads exclude easily or readily. It is a really difficult decision for a headteacher. In Peterborough we have a combination of all of those, but we are a very small unitary authority. We have all of that within a single, seamless service. We have behaviour support on the front end, where there are referral criteria, and then we have the permanent exclusion route through. Each one of those from day one comes into my service, so we work with the child and the family to do the best thing for the child and the family, but under those



circumstances. We deliver the local authority roles around permanent exclusions and fair access on the other side of that, but we have all the front end services well.

There is a lot of support for teachers in all types of schools within your authority, at the front end for those that say, "This child has exhausted our school resources and we need some external input." Some of that might be for a short-term placement in one of my pupil referral units. For some of those we do a managed move into the pupil referral learning centre because that is where that child needs to be. Then we have the exclusion route, so where the head has made that decision we will work with the school and we look at managed moves as far as we reasonably can, most of which come into my school but not all. Where it is appropriate for the child to go back into a mainstream school, that is what we support.

Q120 Lucy Allan: Is it fair to say that it is quite an inconsistent and fragmented process for making a referral into alternative provision?

Claire George: Not in my authority, no; it is a really clear process. Schools have one of two ways. They make a referral into the behaviour panel, so that is our frontline integrated early intervention, and I have family support workers and a drugs council—there is a whole range of professionals that work in that team with the aim of keeping the child in the school. But it is about working with the family as well, because our belief is that emotional and social needs in children come as part of a wider family picture.

If you are going to create some sustainable change in a child, you have to work with the child in the context of home as well as in school. That is the clear route in the beginning, from the front end, and if it is around permanent exclusion, it is very clear. You fill in your exclusion reporting form. That comes into our office. We do a family meeting within the first five days so that we are picking up the day six provision. That child is then dual-registered with me, so absolutely everybody knows where they are. Then we hold that case until we have the next placement for that child, whether it is in my school or whether we support them through fair access and move into another mainstream school.

Q121 Lucy Allan: That sounds like the model. Does that work in your experience in other places, Ralph?

Ralph Holloway: Not consistently. One of the challenges we have, as a local authority, is the sheer size of our pupil population and school populations. We have upwards of 500 schools. We have some schools that use the PRU very little and other schools that use it a great deal, and that does not necessarily correlate with the intake that that school has. We have tried to introduce some more consistency and challenge around what is an acceptable threshold for referral, but ultimately a school still has the ability to say, "If we don't get the support, permanent exclusion is going to be the next step for us."



Lucy Allan: Yes, that is the concern.

Q122 **Chair:** You mentioned that heads are very reluctant to exclude pupils, if I heard you correctly. Can I ask you why it is that 35 children are excluded every day, which is the size of a classroom plus? I am going to ask the panel but you, Claire, as well.

Claire George: I can only speak for the experience of the Peterborough Local Authority. You don't go into teaching to do anything other than make a difference and provide children with an education and strong, positive outcomes. The actual decision to exclude a child is, in my experience, very difficult for a head to come to. However, you have to balance the need of that child with the rest of the school community. What we are seeing in our authority is that exclusions for things like persistent disruptive behaviour have fallen massively because of all the additional support. We are now really looking at exclusions that are typically around a single serious incident and, to be fair, some of those need to be permanent exclusions.

Ralph Holloway: I think some heads find it more difficult than others. I don't think any head finds it easy. We have seen primary exclusions increase significantly, from about eight to 50 in the space of four years. I think primary heads will say they are seeing significant challenges coming through from reception year, early years, about school-readiness that impacts on their ability to manage behaviour within schools safely. I think heads will say, "We made a decision in the best interests of the entire school population." If they were saying, "We made a decision in best interests of the young person," it would be very difficult to substantiate that in the long term.

David Whitaker: I tend to agree with Ralph. I also think it is about where the bar is set in individual schools, and that is strikingly obvious across a number of local authorities that I am involved in and, therefore, there is not consistency. I also agree with Claire, in that I don't think any headteacher takes an exclusion lightly, but some of them have their arms bent by certain systems and practices that are in place within the schools.

Chair: Something is going wrong if 35 children are excluded every day.

David Whitaker: Absolutely.

Q123 **Chair:** I went to Poland recently to see their education system and it is virtually impossible to exclude a pupil. It happens, but you have to have a court order that comes in, and yet they are doing very well in terms of education and PISA league tables.

Quickly referring to what Lucy was saying about referrals: should there be a standardised process of referrals that applies to every school across the UK to deal with the inconsistencies that occur?

Ralph Holloway: It is less about process and more about threshold and about the availability of support to that school in that particular area.



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Claire has described what is available in Peterborough. That is not necessarily what is available to every school in Essex. If I was a headteacher and I had access to behaviour support services, mental health services, I would feel much more comfortable in having a common threshold or process, but if I was a head in a local authority that did not have that kind of support, that would be something that I felt tied my hands.

David Whitaker: There is also a difference from school to school. Some schools invest a lot of money in inclusion within their own school—inclusion units and supporting schools. Some other schools don't invest much at all, so you get that inconsistency.

Claire George: If you put the child at the centre of this, there are a number of children for whom mainstream provision does not work, and we have this view that being excluded and being sent to a PRU is the punishment. If we could only reverse that, so that the inclusion stops being a "one size fits all" and is about, "What does this child need in the here and now?" So yes, we are a school, but we spend as much classroom time dealing with social and emotional issues, dealing with family crises. You have got to look at children as holistic beings, in the context of their families.

I have children that come to school hungry, so I give them breakfast. I have kids that will come in on a Monday that haven't eaten since I sent them home on Friday. Their dad has gone off to prison. They have things that lots of other children don't have to contend with. So for me, if we look at the child in the middle of this, for lots of my children, coming to me is the best thing that has ever happened to them.

Q124 **Emma Hardy:** Do you think the inconsistency is partly driven by school funding?

David Whitaker: Yes. There needs to be money in the system to be able to do the early intervention. We talk about mental health and we all know the demands on the National Health Service and CAMHS for mental health and the long waiting lists, so there is something in that. Funding has to be in schools and there has to be a context to it. Some schools do genuinely need more money to look after the communities they serve and, potentially, they need more than a school down the road, so I think the funding has an impact all the way through the system.

Q125 **Thelma Walker:** Basically, what we are saying is it is to do with funding, but if every mainstream school had early intervention, a broad and balanced curriculum, well trained, upskilled staff who knew how to support individual children, would there be any need for PRUs?

Ralph Holloway: A great deal of money is spent at the crisis end of the system. If you could move that to early intervention you would be beginning to be able to do that but, of course, while you still have pupils in independent school provision, because there is no provision within the



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county or in PRU provision, you cannot release that funding easily, so it is how you balance the two.

Q126 Mr William Wragg: Good morning, everybody. Going back to the process, I want to touch on fair access protocols and their usefulness and whether they work. We have received written evidence of some examples of best practice. The Pendlebury Centre, which is the PRU that serves my constituency in Stockport, has given details of the borough's fair access protocol. Quite straightforwardly, do they work, and if not, why not?

David Whitaker: To refer directly to Barnsley, recently we have been putting a lot of time and effort into trying to make them work. A lot of that is to do with this level of accountability and making sure that schools have done their utmost to prevent the children coming out of the mainstream before they end up in a pupil referral unit. We have seen a real shift change in the number of children coming through on a monthly basis. That is because we are trying to focus on that pre-emptive work. As Ralph mentioned earlier, if we are not careful we just do sticking-plaster and that is the expensive bit and it is the bit at the end.

We are trapped in a system at the moment where we want to get the referrals right, we want to get that fair access protocol right, but it almost needs upfront funding to be able to put the funding into the schools to prevent the children coming out. We are trapped in that in between, where we have high costs at the end.

Claire George: Ours works really well. We are a small unitary authority, with 12 secondary schools. We have a fair access protocol that all schools are signed up to. I do the direct personal contact with a head to say, "Could you have a look at this child for me, please?" Part of the reason that it works is because we have established trustworthy relationships. Heads know that I will not ask them to take a child unless I am pretty confident the placement is going to work.

Any child who goes from one school to another—certainly from my school or if I have moved them as a result of permanent exclusion—is underpinned with a short period of dual registration with my school, which decreases the risk for the child and for the head as well. We support the transition meeting to the new school and we support the transition process as well, so we do everything that we can to make the placement work.

Ralph Holloway: I am not convinced that they work as well as they could do. Part of that is about silo budgets, so you are looking at it from an education perspective. You are not necessarily looking at where other funding, like health funding and social care funding, could come into play.

I also think there are some inconsistencies around who is actually presenting for fair access. A lot of children will not come through fair access because their parents are going direct to a school that has space, in-year admission, and it is obliged to take that young person. That might



mean that a school down the road that is in a better position to support their needs is encouraging parents to look at other schools, so we have an element of that, in essence.

Q127 Mr William Wragg: Do you think that is more an issue to do with the size? Earlier you mentioned the size of your authority and compared it with the size of Claire's authority. As an authority, have you looked at how you might compartmentalise the county slightly?

Ralph Holloway: We do. Our fair access protocol works very much on a district basis, so it would be equivalent to a smaller authority. It is only as strong as the individual schools within it and their commitment to the fair access protocol, and that is the difficulty.

Q128 Trudy Harrison: With regards to commissioning, the IPPR "Making The Difference" report states that less than a third of commissioning schools in their sample "carried out any systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning at the placements". If the decisions have been made in the interests of students, how do we know if they have been the right decisions if that evaluation is all too often not actually being taken into account? That is a question for all of you.

Ralph Holloway: I speak from a local authority perspective, so if we are talking about routes into our pupil referring it is we, as a local authority, work very closely with our standards in excellence team. We have constant work with our PRUs to make sure that they are working to the very highest standard. What we are not able to do is look at the wider alternative provision market and have the same kind of conversation, and what we are not able to do is for schools to have constant regard for the young people that they have placed in alternate provision, opting for a referral unit. If I am a headteacher making a commissioning decision, I would want to know, on a very regular basis, attendance, progress, what else is going on for that young person. If I don't, and Ofsted knock on the door, I would expect to be asked why I am not doing that, but that does not happen consistently.

Claire George: As a headteacher of a pupil referral unit, or a series of pupil referral units, we are a school and we are subject to all the same standards in testing, Ofsted reporting, quality of teaching and learning as everybody else. That is there and that is in the public domain.

I work with a motor vehicle provider that does motor vehicle training for my students, because I don't have those facilities. I send a member of staff with them weekly so I know exactly what is going on. I would do exactly the same quality checks on them that I would do on any of my internal schools.

Where we have a dual-registered placement, so a headteacher has placed a child with me on a short-term placement, we have a weekly report so all those things—lesson by lesson, behaviour, attendance, work rate—go back weekly to the school and to the parent. Then we have a monthly



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review with the school of how the placement is going, so everybody is very clear about what is going on. It is very open and very transparent.

Q129 Trudy Harrison: How much of that comes down to you—your personality and your desire to work that way, compared with legislation or mandatory data collection?

Claire George: I think that there is room to improve, particularly in the use of registered and unregistered provision. The responsibility sits with the headteacher to know the quality of the provision your pupils are accessing. You are spending public money and you are accountable to bodies like Ofsted.

As a head, it is my responsibility to know what my children are accessing. It is also my responsibility, if I am the provider, to be the head, to make sure from my perspective, but it is their responsibility to ensure that that provision is good quality, so there is definitely room for changing the legislation. For me, every child should be accessing only registered provision. I think that is a big step forward.

Q130 Trudy Harrison: David, what are your thoughts?

David Whitaker: It is probably worth remembering that, as far as Ofsted is concerned, pupil referral units go through inspection every three years and they are never exempt, so “good” and “outstanding” providers and pupil referral units are still subject to a three-year cycle.

If we commission AP on top of that, that is inspected as part of our inspection as well, so it would be very remiss of us to put children into AP that we weren’t satisfied was quality-assured properly. If you are held to that three-year cycle there is a significant level of accountability that commissioners can use when commissioning places from local authorities.

Q131 Trudy Harrison: In your view, it is sufficient?

David Whitaker: As Claire said, as headteachers we are accountable constantly and that is what we do. We would work with local authorities. If the local authorities commission us, we have a system of checks that they put in place, based on a service level agreement that they have with us, so that can be continually checked, plus the Ofsted regime, which slots in alongside that.

Q132 Lucy Powell: Following on from that, one of the things we have heard about during the course of this inquiry is the massive growth in the less formal use of alternative provision. You guys are more at the statutory end of things and the IPPR figures suggest that there may be 22,000 hidden children in this, in some cases slightly unregulated and in some cases less formal. You touched on this, Claire, but do you think there is enough scrutiny of schools’ use of alternative provision, more broadly, in terms of tracking and transparency and us knowing where children are, and whether they are receiving the right provision more generally, in your experience? Claire, you said you thought it needed a lot more



regulation.

Claire George: Short answer: no. As a head, I am the responsible person. We make decisions. My finance committee wants to know what I am spending on motor vehicles, what I am spending on hairdressing; curriculum standards wants to know what the kids are coming out with at the end of it. But I think at a process level there are authorities that will say, "Our headteachers are allowed to exclude. Children have managed moves from one school to another." When they have done that two or three times and the child has not been fixed, because nobody has dealt with the causal factors, then that child starts to slip out of the system. I think there are serious numbers of children who are in corners somewhere, perhaps doing a couple of hours a week that is unchecked, that people don't know the quality of, and probably are coming out with little or very, very poor outcomes.

For me, using the exclusion process—I appreciate that people find that a bit scary—the legal process is there to protect people and it protects the child as much as it protects the school. When you have a child who has gone through that process, everybody knows where they are, where they have been placed and what they are accessing. People have opportunities to check the quality.

There are children in unregistered provision and that does need work on, but I think there are processes attached to that as well. When you just move a child between schools, and school A is responsible but the kid is over here in school D but nobody knows what they are really doing, I think there are some significant process issues that need dealing with.

Q133 **Lucy Powell:** You are almost suggesting that perhaps the drive to drive down exclusions—

Claire George: It is not helpful.

Lucy Powell: —is actually pushing that and that sometimes formalising it a bit more is better.

Claire George: If you take it back to a basic safeguarding level, because we are teaching children but we also want to keep them safe, the kinds of kids that end up in my kind of school are the most vulnerable. They are the most challenging but they are the most vulnerable as well, so, from a safeguarding point of view, you have children who are under people's radar.

Ralph Holloway: I agree with Claire to an extent, but what we are beginning to see is a commercial decline in the use of that unregistered provision. Schools are unwilling to fund because they cannot because some of those costs are quite excessive, and also because there is beginning to be more of a light shone on those unregistered provisions and they are feeling it is more of a risk. It is exactly the kind of risk that Claire has just highlighted, around safeguarding and outcomes. You cannot be sure in an unregistered provision what you are getting for your



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money and whether the young person is going to make the progress you want them to.

David Whitaker: There has been a shift change recently and you are probably aware that Ofsted has had a real focus on inspecting AP providers as part of school inspections. As Claire and Ralph say, and I tend to agree with them, we have to be careful with the use of AP when it is commissioned directly from schools because if the only QA that they are doing is through Ofsted, some of those schools might not be Ofsted-reviewed for four, five, six years. There is a danger that mainstream schools can place children in alternative provision with unregistered providers. If there are only small numbers with that provider and they are not using any other schools, they could go on without inspection for years and years and years, without even having a visit from an Ofsted inspector as part of a school inspection. Therefore, it is down to the schools to put in place their own quality assurance checks. If they don't do that, there is a real risk of some significant safeguarding issues developing in those AP providers.

Q134 **Lucy Powell:** A couple of quick follow-up questions on that. First, what about home schooling—people being advised to do home schooling when they are not equipped to do it, rather than the old view of elective home schooling? Are you concerned about that and what can we do about it?

Chair: To come in on that—slightly harder—do you think children excluded from schools should not be allowed to go to unregistered schools?

Lucy Powell: This is often not excluded though, isn't it, as well? This is not—

David Whitaker: The elective home education angle, you mean? For me, elective home education—yes, is it really elective home education? It has just gone out of control.

Q135 **Chair:** There is the home education done by the individual parent, but I am talking specifically about the unregistered schools. Should children who are either informally or formally excluded be allowed to go to unregistered schools where, as you have just said, they are not inspected if they have five or fewer pupils? Should that be stopped?

Ralph Holloway: The system needs to change because it is currently forcing some vocational providers—who are really good providers—to register as an independent school, and to me that does not make a great deal of sense. It is too binary. There should be a registration that allows them to be in the system but not an all-or-nothing kind of choice.

David Whitaker: I tend to agree with that. One of the problems with the system is that if everybody has to make a significant shift to be registered, we might lose some really great providers who are working with small numbers of children, who are doing some part-time, who are doing it really well. Some of them are reluctant to turn themselves into



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schools and I think there should be a more graduated approach to that. They absolutely need to be accountable and the children need to be safe but—

Q136 **Chair:** Is the answer that they should be inspected in the same way as registered schools are?

David Whitaker: I think they have to go through some sort of regime, probably not as heavy as a full Ofsted inspection but there must be something in there that can be done.

Q137 **Lucy Powell:** A final question on that point. It seems to me that what is coming through from your comments today, and our inquiry more generally, is that in the fragmented school system, where it is very much autonomous and it is upon schools to commission and place and decide what is happening with the school—Ralph, you might want to add something—the old role of the local authority, in that sense, to be the quality assurance, to be the backstop, to be the overview of accountability, has become almost impossible.

Ralph Holloway: It is impossible. “Impossible” is the right word because we don’t have the resource to do that. We can maintain a list of providers where we have gone and done the basic checks around safeguarding. It is then down to individual schools to decide whether they commission that and whether they then hold them to account, but we do not have the ability to do that.

Q138 **Lucy Powell:** In that context, do you think there is a role to re-establish a role for the local authority, in terms of vulnerable children—off-rolled, excluded children—to require schools to consider some of these issues?

Ralph Holloway: With some money to do it, yes.

Q139 **Chair:** It is astonishing that schools are not required to share information with local authorities if they commission their own alternative provision. Should that not be a compulsory requirement?

Ralph Holloway: It should be, but then I could collect all the data on young people who are not receiving a full-time offer from schools. The question is: what do I then do with it? I don’t have a huge team that can go in and check what is happening to those individual young people. If there is an accountability system that comes into the local authority directly from schools, there needs to be the ability for a local authority to actually do something with it.

Q140 **Emma Hardy:** Lucy was saying about people being chosen to home-school but it is not really home schooling; it is just off-rolling. It is just the schools moving them from there. I just wondered whether you thought there were particular school cultures that seem to drive this, or whether you had witnessed certain types of schools that seem to be keener to encourage children to be home-educated.



David Whitaker: If I look at the figures for Barnsley, the number of children who are on the elective home register has gone from 60 to 300 in the last three years, so something somewhere is going wrong. There are various reasons for that and a lot of the reasons that come through are recorded as “dissatisfaction with school”, and I think that tells a tale—dissatisfaction with school. And accountability is putting pressure on the system all the way through.

I think there are children who are moving on to the elective home register and even headteachers don’t know they are or the reasons why they are, and the accountability is a sort of push down through the school. You may, for example, get a head of year who is under so much pressure to get things right in that year group that they may hint, “There is another option here and it is elective home education,” and the headteacher will not even know that that is happening.

Therefore, we have to be wary. We have to be really careful about where the steer to elective home education is coming from; and about what we do at the point of electing home education around addressing it and saying, “Okay. Where is the challenge about making sure that those children are back in school, or that they should not have come out in the first place?” That is the bit that we need to focus on as well, but it needs funding. It needs somebody to do it and it needs a team of people at a local authority or a commission to be able to do that. Like everything, money needs to follow that process to be able to put those things in place.

Q141 **Emma Hardy:** You think it is being driven by the accountability system?

David Whitaker: I think that is an element of it. You don’t shift from 60 children in elective home education to 300 in three years without a reason. There has got to be a reason. There has got to be a pressure in the system. I know from talking to parents and from children that we have worked with that there are parents who will say, “I am just sick and tired of the children getting excluded. I am sick and tired of getting phone calls. I am sick and tired of getting letters, so I have taken them out of school.” Is that really home schooling? No, it is not, but what it means is that they can go on to the home school register and then, six months later, they can apply through general admissions and go back into another school through an admissions process.

Q142 **Ian Mearns:** I am particularly interested in that. Would you say that Barnsley is atypical in terms of the numbers, or do you think it is fairly typical that—

David Whitaker: I am sure there has been a general increase in the numbers, and I am sure Ralph and Claire will be able to tell you about their local authorities. Without being anecdotal I think that—

Q143 **Ian Mearns:** I am not convinced that anybody is collating the information on this nationally at the moment. Three hundred in Barnsley



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would probably imply 40,000 or 50,000 around the country if those figures were replicated, and that is probably not beyond the realms of possibility. That does imply to me, given that an awful lot of those youngsters become off-rolled and then, euphemistically, home educated, because of behavioural difficulties in schools or inability to cope with the curriculum and the syllabus—

David Whitaker: We do get children who move schools via elective home education because they do not have space in their local primary school. They feel that the only option is to genuinely educate at home because there isn't the space in the primary school down the road.

Q144 **Ian Mearns:** In the 2010 to 2015 Parliament we did an inquiry, as a Select Committee, into home education, but the figures were much less than that. You have just said that within three years it has grown dramatically. One can only assume that the numbers have multiplied by five, not because parents have suddenly become interested in the philosophy of home education.

Ralph Holloway: Yes, that is a safe bet.

David Whitaker: That is a safe bet.

Q145 **Ian Mearns:** For youngsters who do need alternative provision, first, is there enough supply? Secondly, is there enough choice to meet their needs?

Claire George: No.

David Whitaker: No.

Ralph Holloway: I don't think there is enough choice. I don't think there is enough supply of the right kind of provision.

Q146 **Ian Mearns:** What happens to youngsters who are properly going through the system, who might end up in a proper, official alternative provision, if even the alternative provision cannot adequately deal with their needs? What happens to them?

Ralph Holloway: From a local authority perspective, ultimately the provision would take that young person through the assessment process. They would get an education healthcare plan. We would then be looking potentially at a special school place, and if there is no special school place then ultimately they might go into the independent special school sector at great cost to the public purse.

Claire George: We just keep going. We don't permanently exclude. We are creating with the resources at our disposal. I have a couple of individuals who are so difficult that they have two staff to themselves for periods of time. It is about keeping an holistic view of that child.

I have to say that I really hate the term "alternative provision" because of the inference of failure. If you put the child at the heart of this, to get



to the education that my children need they have to fail at least once in a mainstream school, sometimes twice, before they get to a place that can look after them. I have brought some pupil statements with me that I am going to leave with you, and they are saying, "I am safe here. I can get on here. I am actually starting to learn here."

Q147 Ian Mearns: It is probably difficult to quantify, but are you coming across many youngsters who are literally struggling in the mainstream because the curriculum does not meet their needs?

Claire George: Yes, a lot.

David Whitaker: Claire mentioned earlier that there is an acceptance that we have children who are best placed in an alternative setting and they are very successful because they are there. If you were then to reintegrate them, because they are settled and they are doing well, they would fail a second time because it is just not right for them. There has to be some sort of acceptance that that is the system at the moment.

Q148 Ian Mearns: Who needs to put their foot on the ball to get a grip on this? Who would you say needs to do that?

Emma Hardy: I vote you.

Claire George: If you can step away from the view that a PRU is a punishment and if you can look at an interpretation of inclusion as the right thing in the right place at the right time for that individual. I talk about my school as a specialist setting because my kids are special and my staff are special and I am a bit special as well, actually, it is fair to say. Yes, I am very special—infectious, they call me.

Ian Mearns: Many years ago I used to be chair of the education committee—when we had such things in Gateshead—and we obviously had PRUs then, but we tried to build a philosophy whereby the PRU was for the youngsters who had been failed by the system, not failed in the system.

Q149 Chair: I loved what you just said about hating the term "alternative provision". I think you are completely right.

Claire George: It implies failure.

Chair: Yes.

Claire George: Some kids deliberately kick their way out of school to be someplace because they know they cannot cope. We have high numbers of kids that are undiagnosed dyslexics or have undiagnosed neurodevelopmental ADHD, ASD. More than 50% of my cohort have a reading age two or three years below their chronological age.

Q150 Chair: You would term them special schools—is that what you were saying?

Claire George: I don't know either. I think of us as a special setting. We get the kids in. We work with them. We love them and they feel that. We



have to work backwards from, "I feel safe. I am physically safe. I feel safe; now I have some headspace for learning." If you are talking about the children who are not managing in the mainstream, sometimes that is around academic stuff but it is most usually around, "My life hurts. I don't know how to deal with it and now you want me to sit and do algebra? I have no headspace for that."

Q151 Ian Mearns: Ralph and Claire, are you aware of the numbers who are now euphemistically being home educated in your own areas?

Ralph Holloway: I am aware that they have gone up significantly.

Ian Mearns: You do not have a number, but you will let us know a number?

Ralph Holloway: Yes¹.

Ian Mearns: Claire, could you do that?

Claire George: We would expect to operate in between about 95 and 105. We are about 149 currently so, yes, we have seen an increase. We are a smaller authority but, yes, something like that.

Ian Mearns: Thank you very much.

Q152 James Frith: I refer my colleagues to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

To zone in on the local provision and there not being enough choice, for me this is a supply argument based on the fact there has been very little demand other than in an area like Bury, where there is one pupil referral unit that all schools would consider. It is not upon the school to consider what they might do within the school to commission services that might provide a similar level of support for the children that they are considering need an alternative provision. We spend a lot of money particularly on out-of-borough provision and we have to look at how we spend that.

There is a huge appetite from the heads I speak to, to be better supported, to keep the young people in mainstream education. Your point about algebra is well made but this is, is it not, a failure of dynamic education? We are ever-narrowing the expectations on schools, vis-à-vis the education they give, and those who don't fit that narrow constraint get excluded out, increasing levels of behaviour issues—I think dissatisfaction was the word you used, David. At a time when there are financial pressures, as well as the curriculum pressures, shouldn't we really be looking at a far more expectant school system that says, "You will be supported in keeping in your school kids that might go to AP

¹ Following the session Ralph Holloway supplied the following figures:

2014-15:	1234
2015-16:	1138
2016-17:	1358
2017-18:	1662

Data reflects the position as at the January census date of each academic year.



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otherwise,” and that they get special support for algebra but that for the mainstream provision of social science or a drama class or an English class, there is a different—and that is taken in real time by the heads for the kids?

I really worry that we have created a kind of apartheid system of separation, when actually kids are going to have their strengths and weaknesses, and that a lot of this rise—60 to 300—would support that argument. I welcome your views on that.

David Whitaker: The starting point is that schools need to be rewarded for being inclusive, and that there needs to be a mechanism where, let’s just say, a school cannot be “outstanding” unless they have a certain measure in place for the number of children with special educational needs, the number of children with free school meals that they take into the school. Otherwise, they would have to be satisfied with “good” and just live with that and they could never be elevated to “outstanding”. Until we have a reward—for want of a better phrase—for headteachers to be genuinely inclusive without the cliff-edge accountability that they face, in my view this is going to continue to happen. They need to be encouraged, rewarded, championed and funded for the children to remain in the schools.

Claire George: We did a lot of work on the 14 to 19 curriculum—you go back quite a long time now, 10 years plus—and that was about recognising that all kids are different. They have different strengths and we need to be growing our builders as much as we need to grow our doctors, and recognising the value of the breadth of the curriculum.

What we have seen is that has narrowed again, and you are creating a situation whereby inclusion and the strive for how many 4s, 5s, English and maths you have, plus the few extras in your buckets in Progress 8, and you get to a point where those things become mutually exclusive.

What we would have done as heads, if you were in a mainstream school, you would have been able to look after your gold group on a Friday because they were doing horticulture. Those things are not there any more, so you get to this point where, as a head in a mainstream, because horrible things can happen to you, you have to be fixated on those 4s, 5s, English, getting you with a group of stuff, and those children that can’t do that struggle.

Then you see that low-level behaviour becomes increasing behaviour because, “I am going into a maths class and I can’t engage with what is going on.” But for the kids that end up needing my sort of care, their life is off the rails. The learning is completely secondary to that. It is, “I can’t manage my life, therefore I can’t function in school.”

Ralph Holloway: I completely agree, particularly on Dave’s point. We need to define what success looks like for the school system, about holistic outcomes for young people. I have even had schools say to me,



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"You need to build more PRU places because of Progress 8" and for me that is completely missing the point.

Claire George: Yes.

Chair: We are going to keep that quote.

Q153 **Lucy Powell:** A very quick follow-on question from that about this area of choice and supply in the system. With the growth of the need for alternative provision because of the restrictions of mainstream and the very good quality there often is in the PRU sector, which is the most vulnerable, do you think the area that lacks the most supply and choice is maybe the more revolving-door bit in the middle, which those who cannot cope with mainstream all the time might need some time in? What we have seen in Manchester is that bit in the middle because the PRU has grown too big and it is the most vulnerable.

Ralph Holloway: There needs to be more flexibility and the provision needs to be far more local to the young person. In Essex, which is a huge area, we have children travelling significant distances to get to a pupil referral unit at cost, where actually we should be working with our schools to give them the flexibility to offer something different locally to those young people. That might be an individual school or it might be a cluster of schools working together. It is that revolving-door bit, exactly as you said, that needs more work.

David Whitaker: There is an issue, isn't there, with complexity? What we found is that the level of complexity of the cohort of children has increased so much that the PRU spaces are filled with really complex children, so there isn't room for the ones that just need that light-touch turnaround. That becomes a problem and what you have is the tier that you mentioned as a sort of buffer, a zone between full mainstream and full PRU, hanging around in the middle with nowhere to go. That is a real problem for us, and so you get a bottleneck in the PRU system.

Lucy Powell: Yes, that is what I thought.

Claire George: It is becoming increasingly long stay and I know when I take on a year 9, I probably have a commitment to the end of year 11. Then over time you cannot do that quick hit stuff on the front.

Q154 **Chair:** We are going to come to quality. We have touched on some of this already. I want to talk in general terms. Ofsted says that less than one-third of commissioning schools in their sample "carried out any systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning at the placements they were using" and the majority of AP providers in the sample had been given no child protection training. My colleagues are going to drill down, but if you look also at the "Making The Difference" report, once a child is excluded they are twice as likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher, twice as likely to have a supply teacher. There is a leadership recruitment crisis in schools for excluded pupils, leader vacancies doubling, the numbers of teacher vacancies in the maintained



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AP and special sector have nearly tripled, and there are other safeguarding issues and building issues and so on. Do we have a real problem here with the quality of—we will keep using this term for now—alternative provision in our country?

David Whitaker: If you think there is a recruitment and retention issue in mainstream schools, you put on top of that working in PRUs and AP and if you have a PRU that is in a rural or coastal town, you are starting to hit all the marks for really difficult to retain and recruit teachers. I can put an advert in the TES and get four or five people apply for it and a mainstream school might get 60, so straightaway the pool you have to choose from is tiny.

Claire George: Our experience is completely the opposite. I do not have any vacancies and I don't have any trouble recruiting. We have a very long-stay, stable staff team. In terms of qualified/unqualified, everybody in key stage 3 in primary is QTS trained. In key stage 4 we have a variety of QTS, QTLS. We do have some unqualified teachers, particularly in the vocation areas, but we are looking to support anybody who comes into the system to gain QTLS probably, so we are really keen.

Ralph Holloway: The pupil referral units in Essex take quality very seriously indeed. They work with us as a local authority and they work with schools, and I would be absolutely confident that they have the best offer they can have in place. My concern would be whether they can maintain that with the increasing numbers of young people and the quality of the estate they have.

Q155 **Chair:** Just to reiterate, across the country they are twice as likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher. I find it extraordinary that children who have serious difficulties can be taught by an unqualified teacher.

Ralph Holloway: It is self-defeating. They need the most support, not the least.

David Whitaker: I would be very interested to look at how the different funding models for the different PRUs reflect the quality of the provision.

Q156 **Chair:** But how is it allowed? In a mainstream school you cannot be an unqualified teacher.

David Whitaker: You can in an academy.

Chair: You can in an academy, yes.

Claire George: When we recruit—my kids are an acquired taste, and I am trying to phrase this really carefully because you are recording it—it is about finding the right balance of skills and qualities, knowledge and experience in the staff that you bring into the school. I have had some staff who are brilliant on paper, very well trained, who actually cannot engage with my kind of pupil. I have other people who have all those skills and qualities and I can support them to get qualifications, so I think the quality of education is really important. You measure that in lots of



ways, including progress in attainment as well as outcomes. I also think that the fixation on if you have QTS you can therefore do that is—

David Whitaker: We have some brilliant teaching assistants, as you have—superb teaching assistants who can just work miracles with the children.

Q157 **Chair:** You do not think it should be a requirement that teachers should at least be qualified in looking after—

David Whitaker: I think it should be an aspiration.

Chair: Given that these are kids with significant difficulties, that they should have some kind of specialised training at least, do you think that should be compulsory?

Claire George: Yes. The leadership teams are trained teachers and leaders, so you have your quality at the strategic level and I think there should be a requirement that if you are taking people on, there is a commitment to training. We are starting to use the apprenticeship levy to do some good work in school, so the quality of education is important but in that kind of holistic sense as well.

Ralph Holloway: The family support worker could be as important at points of time as a teacher for engaging the young person and understanding the needs they have.

Q158 **Thelma Walker:** I was a headteacher myself at two schools and in all of my career I only permanently excluded two children and—I will be honest with you—it broke my heart and it affected the whole school family as we talked about it ourselves. I worked with inspirational teachers who gave everything to those children. You mentioned earlier, Claire, about feeling that you had failed almost. I felt like we had given up on them somehow.

When I look at the data—and Robert has just mentioned the number of unqualified teachers—as I say, I worked with inspirational teachers who said, “We can’t support this child any longer. We need further help.” Then going on to alternative provision where maybe one in eight teachers is unqualified, they may be being taught by supply teachers. We have talked around what we would want in a perfect world, but we have children moving on to AP. What about reintegration as well? They move on to AP. The quality of teaching may not be meeting their needs. They spend some time with that experience there. When we think about that change in curriculum, the quality of teaching, how can it work in terms of reintegrating children back into the mainstream?

Claire George: In primary and lower key stage 3, we have just gone to collapsed key stage 3 and the extended key stage 4 because of our bulging year 9. In primary and year 7/8 the curriculum that we deliver reflects the national curriculum. We have to obviously take into account the child’s start points. We do baseline assessments on everybody. That is their start point when they come to us, rather than any information



that we get elsewhere. We are a small unit but the breadth of the curriculum mirrors what they would be accessing in mainstream, so where we get to the point of reintegration we are able to do that quite seamlessly.

Ralph Holloway: Where reintegration fails is where there is no understanding, or less of an understanding, of what issues that young person is going to bring back with them. You don't go to a pupil referral unit and transform and become a model pupil. You go back in with some of the challenges you went out with.

I think at Dave's school it is unconditionally positive regardless. That mantra is what you need when you are looking at a young person going back into the mainstream. You need to accept that there will be times where they will be extremely challenging and you have to accept that. That does not mean that it is to the detriment of the rest of the school. But you are going to have to work with strategies to support that young person, otherwise they will just be back out again and it is a revolving door that does not stop.

David Whitaker: There is still a sort of belief in some circles that a PRU is a short, sharp shock, a punishment—"Go to the PRU for a few weeks. That will sort you out and then come back to school and you will have changed." It is just not like that at all.

Lucy mentioned earlier the problem with PRUs. We have a lot of children in PRUs and lots of them are going to stay there because they need to be in specialist provision, which is what Claire said. The whole concept of reintegration is becoming more and more challenging. The schools have to do their bit, so they have to change as well. The children have to change. There is some work to be done on the way the children are in their mainstream community, and it is just very difficult.

Q159 **Thelma Walker:** In a previous session Kiran Gill mentioned upskilling staff, giving them the skills, the ability, the knowledge and the understanding to be able to support.

David Whitaker: That has to happen, yes, hence The Difference programme, so that some of that skill and knowledge can be taken back into mainstream, the reintegration of children into mainstream, or even the fallout in the first place does not happen.

Q160 **Emma Hardy:** I was in a debate yesterday with Nick Gibb. In this debate we were having a discussion about whether schools could offer a schools curriculum or whether they only offered an exam curriculum. Nick Gibb claimed that schools were able to offer this broad and balanced school curriculum and I was saying I think schools at the moment can only offer an exam curriculum. Do you agree with that? Do you think, therefore, that alternative provision is the only place that certain children can get the school curriculum that they desperately need?

Claire George: Yes.



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David Whitaker: I agree, absolutely; of course I do.

Claire George: They have to fail in order to be able to get there. That is the cruel bit.

David Whitaker: We just see it playing out, don't we? No matter what we say, we see it playing out. There is a pressure on exams and progress and Ralph's killer statement about Progress 8. You see it playing out and it is really, really true.

Q161 **Emma Hardy:** On the curriculum that children get in alternative provision—this week, as you know, is National Apprenticeship Week and it is also National Careers Week—what do you do in your schools to help children prepare for that next step, to help them prepare post-16 to go into FE and getting a career or going into apprenticeship? What sort of things can you offer them?

David Whitaker: We have a dedicated member of staff. We call them a NEETs prevention mentor. They work with all the children who are in year 10 and 11, mainly year 11s. They support them through college applications, looking at apprenticeships, and even support them over the summer holidays. A lot of our children change their minds over the summer holidays. They have a college place but over the summer holidays it becomes a bit too stressful to turn up at college in September, so we have a member of staff who is dedicated to support them over the summer holidays and into September when they are not even on our roll.

She will work with them in September, all the way up to Christmas. Even if they fall off their original course she will help them to get a second course or find another place to be in college, rather than just abandoning them to the big bad world at 16. That has been really successful for us and had a real impact on the children successfully moving into post-16 education.

Q162 **Emma Hardy:** Do you think that should be expanded to be offered to everyone? We were saying just before that alternative provision or specialist settings finish at 16. Should there be somebody there to hand-hold these young people through that first year, through that transition?

David Whitaker: Yes.

Q163 **Emma Hardy:** What do you think that should look like, ideally?

Claire George: We have a similar model. I used my pupil premium with somebody we call a progression co-ordinator. We do careers events where we invite the providers into school, because that breaks down the barrier of, "All the kids sling chairs in there." Actually, they don't. I make them stand up. No, I don't.

We invite the providers in. We then support with open days and all those other things, the college applications, take people to interview because that is often a wobbly point: you do not have anybody to go with you. All



right, well, we will do that bit. Sometimes you have to do that, two, three, four, five times to have a successful one. Then there is all that support in the autumn term.

We run a targeted programme for vulnerable girls. One of the things that we did last September for the first time—they start stressing when they come back after Christmas, “I’m leaving in the summer. I am not going to manage. I need to stay. You need to make a sixth form.” I don’t need to make a sixth form, but we doubled our timetables. We cleared a Friday morning and I worked with the two significant colleges, so that actually anybody that had been mine who wanted to come back on a Friday morning for a post-16 catch-up, coffee, bring your washing, whatever, could do that.

Q164 Chair: What you are saying is invaluable. We have the next panel coming very soon. We are going to finish this session at 10 past, so all of us are going to have to rush through the last bit. I apologise.

In terms of the curriculum, we had written submissions from Ofsted and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner. They raised concerns about the restricted curriculum on offer in alternative provision, suggesting that some teachers have low aspirations for their pupils. Ofsted has raised concerns about the level of qualifications on offer and suggested that some students were studying at levels below what they were studying at school. We have had other evidence suggesting that a watered-down curriculum is seen by pupils in AP as not valuing or respecting them as equal to their peers. Could you comment on those things very briefly?

Ralph Holloway: I would say how on earth is a PRU of 200 pupils supposed to offer the same curriculum breadth as a secondary school of 1,500 pupils? The system needs to move away from the PRU being the be-all and end-all and having an offer from the other local secondary schools to extend that curriculum to children who might have to use their base but are able to travel to schools locally and do more than they would be able to do in that small setting.

Claire George: In my school we do core curriculum, everybody does creative things—food tech is part of the core curriculum—and they have access to vocational qualifications. We run a broad and balanced curriculum that is tailored to the needs and interests of my children and their post-16 opportunities.

David Whitaker: How is it possible to get a child through a two-year GCSE course if they are only with you for six months?

Q165 Chair: I am here to find out what your views are, so you are basically saying Ofsted is wrong—is that right?

David Whitaker: It is not sophisticated enough.

Chair: That they do not understand alternative provision. We have Ofsted coming in this week.



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Q166 **Lucy Powell:** Is it partly what we were saying before—that for some kids there is not that bit in the middle now? They are in a PRU when really they do not need to be there?

David Whitaker: A genuine vocational offer for children who need something different to a full-time—it is that “10 academic subjects or nothing” offer.

Q167 **Emma Hardy:** Just a quick question on some of the comments that Ofsted has made. It said, “The vast majority of PRUs safeguard their children effectively” but it raised points that some aren’t able to manage people’s behaviour and the majority of providers have not undergone any formal child protection training. Do you think alternative provision is held to a higher standard than other schools in terms of safeguarding and its building? Is it unrealistic to meet all these safeguarding expectations or do you think the safeguarding expectations are right because of the pupils that you tend to have in your schools?

Chair: Just linked to that, the quality of buildings.

Emma Hardy: The quality of buildings, yes, which is my—

Chair: If you could give us short answers.

Claire George: I have three buildings, one with a bit of a leaky roof but the local authority is working on that, so we are really happy. From a safeguarding perspective, if you are talking about unregistered provision, I think there are some real dangers there. If you are talking about my school, safeguarding is outstanding. I also lead safeguarding education for the whole of the authority. I am a social worker. I train my staff at least annually in full safeguarding and we do the Prevent training as well. On a monthly basis there is a catch-up of safeguarding needs to meet. Safeguarding is a higher priority for me than people outcomes.

David Whitaker: I would like to talk about buildings, if that is okay. It is very clear, I think you will probably find, that pupil referral units have been placed in buildings that nobody else wants. Again this is anecdotal but what you might find is a mainstream primary school that is not deemed fit enough now for the mainstream primary school children and they get a nice shiny building down the road and they spend a few hundred quid turning what was an inadequate primary school into a PRU. I think it is shifting. From my own personal experience the free schools programme has helped us with that around AP free schools and allowing us to look at building new provision. I suspect if you were to look at buildings and pupil referral units across the country you would find that they were considerably different from mainstream schools in the buildings and the provision of the buildings.

Q168 **James Frith:** Much of what we have discussed today has been about who is responsible or who is taking responsibility for all our children and those children who move into alternative or specialist education. Do you think that a shift of responsibility to the school of origin for outcomes and destinations and success of the student in education would change this



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apparent readiness to manage out our children, as has been the case?

Ralph Holloway: How that is measured would be difficult. Somebody is going to need to collect that information and process it. The local authority at the moment holds all of the responsibility but not enough of the resource.

Claire George: No, I don't.

Q169 **James Frith:** What would you like to see?

Claire George: For me it is about having the processes right so they are clear and transparent, everybody knows where the child is and that they are accessing good quality provision in the here and now.

Q170 **James Frith:** Would you accept that good practice, while existing, is not consistent?

Claire George: I would.

Q171 **James Frith:** You would prefer the trigger for defined alternative provision but that, over recent time, has become the go-to resource but shouldn't have been?

Claire George: Yes.

David Whitaker: If accountability remained with the schools it would have some impact but it would not be the answer. We sometimes have children who have been to three or four different schools. If a child has gone from mainstream A to mainstream B and only lasted for two months in mainstream B, who takes the accountability, A or B? There has to be a formula—

Q172 **James Frith:** I absolutely can see that point. I met a family who are really distressed. This process of duality, entitlement to both types of education, according to their understanding, had been stopped, had been ended by the mainstream school by virtue of her non-attendance for a term. She is now two terms out of formal education and as a young woman the stigma attached to going to a special school, as might otherwise have been the case, is too significant. She is literally left without any provision reaching out for her. I have seen a tick box on the front of an assessment from each of the mainstream schools that she has applied to and a kind of walk away. Who is responsible for that in this current system?

Claire George: To me that would be probably in part a relationship between admissions and fair access. That child does have an entitlement to a school, she has to attend, of course, so there are responsibilities on both sides, but that is about having the flexibility to say, "What does this young person need and what can we build around them?" making the processes fit the child.

Q173 **James Frith:** Fair access? Do you think it rests a lot with fair access?



Claire George: A large proportion in the example you describe, yes.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for, first of all, what you do, which is extraordinary, and also for this invaluable evidence session. We are grateful to you and I am sure that we will work with you as we are preparing our report. Thank you very much.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Colin Jeffrey, Emma Bradshaw, Chaz Watson and Joanne Southby.

Q174 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for coming. To start the session, could I ask you, because there are quite a few of you, to give as concise answers as possible? The acoustics are not great. From our left to right, could you introduce your name and organisation for the benefit of the tape and those watching outside?

Joanne Southby: I am Jo Southby, I am Executive Head, New Horizons, which is a federation of a PRU and two special schools in Bexley and we are part of the London South East Academies Trust.

Chaz Watson: I am Chaz Watson, the Director of SILC Training, Skills and Integrated Learning Centre. We are an alternative provider for the local borough and outside borough.

Emma Bradshaw: Emma Bradshaw, Headteacher of The Limes College, also part of the Moving Education Multi-Academy Trust.

Colin Jeffrey: Colin Jeffrey, Programme Manager for The Prince's Trust in the north-east and a school governor of a large secondary school in Newcastle.

Q175 **Lucy Allan:** Good morning, I would like to ask each of you to explain the route into the provision that you give to pupils, starting with Colin.

Colin Jeffrey: The Prince's Trust education programme Achieve has two different modes of delivery. One is school based, so it is a club that is facilitated by school staff and the curriculum is one that we provide to them alongside enrichment opportunities to bring it to life. That route in is teachers in school identifying a cohort of students for whom an alternative curriculum focused on personal development and employability skills and education will have more benefit by protecting some curriculum time to focus on that. That is about schools making the choice with individuals within the school setting.

The second mode is an out of school provision, in one of our centres, that is delivered over 10 weeks. Picking up on some words from the previous panel, it would be described as short-term turnaround provision to support the student to engage better in their educational setting. In that respect schools are encouraged to think again which students are struggling to engage in the educational setting, who could benefit from some time each week over 10 weeks away from school engaging in group



activities with that personal and social development focus, alongside some one-to-one support from The Prince's Trust staff as well, which is one of the crucial elements of the programme.

Emma Bradshaw: Purely, for the pupil referral unit, through the fair access panel that works very strongly with all secondary schools contributing in a part of that process. That is also where we would put children back through the fair access panel and we take a group of respite students that we call turnaround students, who stay in school for half of the week, and come to us not in the PRU, in a separate building, where we do a preventative programme with.

We also take a number of students who are commissioned by the local authority from the SEN panel, which would have EHCPs, and we create a bespoke and tailored group for vulnerable pupils, which was historically a girls' group but is now a mixed-gender group for vulnerable pupils that we run as an EHCP programme as well.

Q176 **Lucy Allan:** You mention the route out. How common is it that there would be reintegration from your provision?

Emma Bradshaw: This year, since September, we will have put back 10 to 12 students—in fact it will be 12 by this panel next week. It has become more difficult because the number of young people that we are getting are much more complex and we are doing far more work with assessment and then looking to move them into specialist provision. Very often they are youngsters who have not had assessment early enough and we are needing to move into highly specialist provision.

Q177 **Lucy Allan:** It is not an ambition for all pupils that come to you?

Emma Bradshaw: What we would say is in primary and in key stage 3 we would expect all students to leave. It is short term: you either come to us and you go back to mainstream school or you are assessed and you move on into long-term specialist provision. That is our aim. But we do have a cohort of key stage 4s where we see their destination and how they reintegrate back into mainstream as college, apprenticeship, and we take them and the qualifications they need to get a destination in as much time as we can.

Q178 **Lucy Allan:** Is there a plan for every child?

Emma Bradshaw: Absolutely. Every child comes in and there is a clear assessment process and from that assessment process is formulated a plan. The key thing at the beginning is to know where you are aiming for. That assessment process has to form what the destination is for this young person. We need to get them some qualifications and then we need to move them on to college, create a bespoke programme for them where we work very closely with alternative providers as well as our own teaching staff, or we are assessing and acknowledging there is so much unmet need within this young person that they need long-term specialist provision.



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Q179 **Lucy Allan:** Chaz, how is a child referred into the provision that you give?

Chaz Watson: A child will be referred to us through a variety of different schools that we work with, depending on their needs. The information that comes with that student would be looked at before we assess them for a meet and greet, which will be where they see the environment and they are put through various different times of the day, depending on the needs of the student because of anxiety. It may be when students are not in the premises, after 2.30. We look at all the professionals that are working with that young person and what is going to be the right package we can put together, depending again on the needs and all the information that comes together with that person as well.

In our kind of environment, a lot of the learners that we work with are visual learners, so a lot of them come in with low self-esteem because for one reason or another in education—and where they are visual learners they can see what they are achieving quite quickly. Just an interview sometimes can be an achievement. We are working currently with over 31 different schools and PRUs. I am an independent company that has been running for 10 years. The support that we have had from the schools and provisions has also helped us to get where we are.

Joanne Southby: There are two referral routes into our PRU. One is through the act of permanent exclusion, so the local authority day 6 provision. The other is via our own internal referral process, which schools are made aware of, and that is for preventative work. That can take the form of either short-term respite, which we call our refocus programme, a turnaround programme, with the aim of children moving back into school, or for outreach work, so work done in school to try to prevent children coming to the PRU. We try where we can to keep them in school.

Q180 **Lucy Allan:** Do you think you are called in early enough in the preventative mode?

Joanne Southby: It depends on the school. Schools will, with the best will in the world, try to work internally with their own resources, but with resources shrinking there is more of a need to use our services. What we have seen locally is that for a lot of schools with shrinking budgets, the cuts are being made in pastoral staff, teaching assistants, family workers. We are seeing an increase in early intervention to our services but whether that is masked by the cuts in the school—I would tend to think that probably is the case at the moment.

Q181 **James Frith:** On integration, in the last panel we heard about the journey that a child has to go on for his or her successful alternative provision education or, indeed, any reintegration. With our mind on reintegration within mainstream, what typically would spell success for a mainstream school successfully reintegrating a child that has been temporarily excluded?



Colin Jeffrey: The measures we take at the point of referral and then repeat further on are looking at attendance, engagement at school, whether the child is still deemed at risk, the behaviour—whether we are looking at fixed-term exclusions or behavioural incidents. We would like to see that reduction and we have set less than four fixed-term exclusions or no exclusions whatsoever. We are also looking at their attainment. The key thing for us, relating to the issue of quality and monitoring, is getting the measures prior to engagement and then getting the follow-up measures afterwards, so we can assess the impact of that provision. It is not always easy for us to get that data from the school on the subsequent follow-up measures.

Q182 **James Frith:** What I am keen to hear is the preparation and change of approach or provision or support capacity that a school will do typically to successfully reintegrate and your experiences of those successes.

Emma Bradshaw: First, they have to be willing and you have to work with them. A key part of that is collectively holding each other to account as a really good fair access process. Ours is called our vulnerable pupils panel, but schools need to be challenging each other in that. We need to be sharing figures like we have put back 30 kids this year, they went back into these schools. We share them all out; everybody will take four over number, even if they are full in a certain year group. We need to look at where they went back to, how many stayed, how many came out, and some of that accountability is helpful because then you get peer challenge between heads, but you also have to have schools that have invested in inclusion programmes. I will say to my heads, "I am going to send you a young person back that is coming through the fair access. They are going to be known to your head of year. They are going to be, probably, a constant person who pops up every now and then. They are going to be a little person who is going to need support and help."

We need to send them back being realistic about what they are going to need. They are going to need mentoring. They have to be prepared to make that work. The other key thing is they need to be prepared for a fresh start.

Q183 **Mr William Wragg:** Good morning. My question to the previous panel was on the fair access protocols, so the same question for you as providers of alternative provision: do they work, and if they don't work, why?

Colin Jeffrey: In terms of our provision, it depends when it is used. Generally a school will, in terms of our incentive provision, make a referral quite late, when a young person is in a bit of a crisis situation in school and is probably heading toward a fair access panel. The early intervention tends not to happen as much as it could. On the outside of that, if a fair access panel is making a move, our incentive provision could work really well to facilitate and support a successful transition to a new placement, but that tends not to happen either, because it is a fresh start and the school is thinking, this might be what is needed. The move



between one school and another through a fair access panel tends not to address any of the systemic issues or the challenges that are going on with that child. The deployment of a move through the panel is seen as, "Well, let's try this," but there is not a lot bolted into that or enough bolted in prior to that becoming a necessity.

Emma Bradshaw: They do work. I don't think it is consistent. There are some areas where not all schools within that local authority are committed to them.

Q184 **Mr William Wragg:** Do you think that is the key thing—having all schools showing that same commitment to it?

Emma Bradshaw: Absolutely. The way that the sector has become fragmented with academisation and different academy chains has split that quite significantly. I know in Sutton that all of our schools were transparent. Through our fair access panel comes all of the elective home education as well, so we are raising and looking at those young people that are out of school for lots of reasons. Our numbers have not rocketed; they have gone up but they have not rocketed because, again, there is that accountability. Heads will be bringing those forward and if a young person comes back through admissions having gone there, we have agreed as a group of heads that they go back to the school that they came out of. There is not that incentive to try to game the system and move around in the schools.

We need to be holding schools to account through the Ofsted process, a bit like what was described with the inclusion. One of the indicators could be, "Are you committed? Are you part of a fair access panel? Can you demonstrate that you send appropriate referrals but also take and include kids who come back?" We are looking at that and making sure that it is robust.

Chaz Watson: For me it is similar to Emma. In my environment we work closely with schools and what is going to be right for the young person to move on and to keep the consistency and the support, because I have some students who have gone back into mainstream and unfortunately have not lasted in mainstream. It is just about preparing them for that change, even when we go into post-16, which I know is another step forward. It is about pairing them and also it is about everybody working together and communicating together; I find that is the best policy.

Q185 **Mr William Wragg:** Joanne, as a provider in an academy chain, do you have a difference of view, given that the school admissions code, if I am correct, in 2012 said that even academies had to be part of some agreed process? Is that right?

Joanne Southby: That is right. I would say that there is inconsistency in fair access protocols. They are as good as the people who sit around the table and their willingness to engage. That really comes down to a local culture. If schools in an area believe that all of the children that are



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discussed around that table are community children and we are all responsible for those children in the community, those panels will work. I think there is almost a misunderstanding or a lack of willingness to understand that the purpose of fair access protocols, as far as I am aware, is as the local authority's vehicle for the most vulnerable children to be brought back, discussed and ideally put back into a mainstream school. Where those protocols are set up, which they are in some cases, to protect schools and enable them to put up barriers to taking children back, it becomes a way of keeping children in alternative provision.

I would agree with what Emma was saying. We work the same kind of system where we have children in key stage 1 to 3 and our ambition would be that those children will return to mainstream school, unless their needs are such that they need to be in specialist provision. It is our key stage 4 pupils that we would keep longer term because we do not want them to yo-yo; we want them to get best outcomes. The issue for us would be that we sometimes will take children repeatedly month on month through fair access panels and there is no movement. The PRU becomes a form of punishment for those children and their engagement becomes less because they have no goal. The need with a PRU child from the outset is to have a clear goal or plan that best meets the needs of that child. If you do not have that, they feel it is almost like being in prison. You have been sent somewhere to be punished, which is the same as Claire said. It is how it is perceived and how it is presented. Fair access has to be a community sign-up and the ability to have peer challenge is what makes it work.

Q186 James Frith: I was interested about fair access panels and that buy-in. Is what you were saying, Emma, which is really powerful stuff, that there should be a universal buy-in from the schools to take a number of students and then a very deliberate and quite determined voluntary aspect of schools identifying as able and willing to take more, and therefore perhaps be privy to more funding or commissioning powers?

Emma Bradshaw: Yes, and at the moment we are doing a review of our fair access placements and looking at what works and what does not work. There are representatives from the schools involved in that, there are representatives from my staff team, all trying to challenge each other. We are putting back increasingly more difficult children because there are more difficult children in the system. The ones we are trying to put back possibly five years ago would have been the PRU kids.

Q187 James Frith: Is peer pressure among heads enough to keep that kind of organic agreement that you have talked about? Is that enough?

Emma Bradshaw: No, I think there does need to be more incentive through the accountability measures, whether it is Ofsted, and making it compulsory that schools have to be a part of giving and receiving in those panels.

Q188 Lucy Powell: Obviously you sat through the last panel and this is a



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similar sort of question to the one I asked the last panel about scrutiny of placements, especially in the slightly more opaque area of the less formal alternative provision space where schools will be commissioning. Do you think there is enough scrutiny and transparency of where children are, what decisions have been made about those children and challenge to that? Do you think there is enough scrutiny, perhaps less so the formal PRU system that you oversee but where a school might use alternative provision as a way of off-rolling or home schooling or whatever?

Emma Bradshaw: No, I don't think there is enough scrutiny. In an earlier evidence session, Kiran Gill talked about missing children. She was absolutely right—the timing of their removal, in key stage 4, is very much around performance tables—that has been generated. Also there is such a massive diversity. Chaz is sitting here with me today and he is one of our key providers. He is an unregistered provider. We monitor and support. We provide safeguarding training. I provide positive handling training, behaviour management training for all of my providers. We have people go and visit all the providers. We share that information with our local schools through our fair access panel and if I have any issues with the provider I will alert the fair access panel. We are sharing that information and that is how we manage it locally.

Chair: The problem is that is not happening across the board.

Emma Bradshaw: No, and that is the issue.

Q189 **Chair:** Would you, as a good unregistered provider, be happy if you were subject to similar regulations as registered providers?

Chaz Watson: Every school and provision that I have worked with for the 10 years that I have been doing this—I have always encouraged, when they are Ofsteded, to please feel free to visit us: "Please don't give us any warning, we would like you to come in at any point." We do get quality-assured. I don't have any qualifications. However, I believe that unfortunately every taxpayer in this room has paid for my life, my past, and I don't think there is a qualification for what I am trying to give to the young people.

We are tough but fair, zero tolerance, and we offer a provision where they are in a safe environment, and we are always looking to strive on quality, any information sharing, anything that is going to help us support the young people that we are working with as well as ourselves and staff. It is very transparent. Sharing of information, those weekly updates, we do it by the day and that is to all schools, to all parents, carers and all professionals who are involved with that one student. We have 15 students a day. That will be done every day, day in, day out, because I will not go home until it is done.

Q190 **Chair:** What is the average stay of a student with you?

Chaz Watson: The average stay of a student depends on the package that is put together. The way we see it is that if a student is coming to us



it is a privilege, and we make that very clear to the student. We have a different approach with the students. They could be with us one day a week for the next two years. However, I am making them aware that the taxpayer is paying for them to attend. I am also making them aware that every time they miss a session the taxpayer is having to pay for them not attending. We also do work with the schools. If we have students that have had a difficult time with a member of staff, we do teach the teacher. Once the student has been with us a little while, the student invites the teacher up to our workshop and they do a role reversal, so we integrate the member of staff. We are all human beings and we have to work that way with the staff and students, and parents and carers. I have had students with me for four years, one day a week. They will not get a second day off me because I feel that one day is plenty for them.

Q191 Lucy Powell: Following on from that point, and I think we heard it in the earlier session, where the school system works well, so the local schools buy in, you have a provider like yourselves who quality-assures the alternative provisioning for that whole community of schools; that all works really well and is probably how it was designed. But as Robert says, that is not everywhere. Perhaps what we are looking at as a Committee is that safety net. What is the carrot and stick and who should hold that carrot and stick—not just Ofsted but maybe the local authority? If a school decides to opt out in your community and not be in your programme, how can we make people behave in the way they do in your areas?

Emma Bradshaw: I think every commissioner needs to be held to account, whether it is a local school or the local authority. You are right: that needs to be transparent and open. Ofsted do that but, as was mentioned earlier, if you are a “good” or “outstanding” school, you are not necessarily going to get Ofsted coming back in.

Q192 Lucy Powell: Who else could do that? Have we moved too far away from the local authority having any say in that? Do you think that is the place to do it?

Emma Bradshaw: It would be very difficult. With current resources and certainly with some of the—in Sutton we have academies but they are all independent academies. In the academy chains it is quite difficult as to how they become accountable back into their local authority. Yes, that is an option and it could be an option in the same way as local authorities are held to account for excluded pupils. They have to know who they are, where they are, make sure they are commissioning. You could have that as a role for a local authority, particularly on unregistered providers, and you would need to resource it.

Lucy Powell: For children who are off site or—

Colin Jeffrey: I think local authorities have tried to do that in recent years, to become the co-ordinator of alternative provision, but increasingly the reach and influence of local authorities is shrinking and



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with multi-academy trusts and academy chains the system has fractured a little bit. One thing that is being tried in Newcastle at the minute is the AP PRU becoming the gatekeeper of alternative provision because they are likely to be using most of the providers for some of their students.

Q193 Lucy Powell: Maybe it is making PRUs system leaders and having a slightly wider remit?

Colin Jeffrey: Yes, but schools will still have to be and will have to take responsibility for the provision that they are referring their students to because the local authority cannot be accountable. I think Claire was saying about going out and monitoring the quality of provision on a weekly basis, as she does, and the PRU could not hold that responsibility. That initial quality checking could be done more centrally in a region.

One of the things that The Prince's Trust is supporting is a kitemark system. I think the previous panel mentioned that unregistered providers whose provision is not mainstream curriculum, which is complementary to support the wider development of a student, can't be held to the same standards and accountable. If we were, you would get some amazing provision that would not be able to sustain itself.

We need to recognise that alternative provision is not a suitable term that describes what we are trying to do. If it is tailored education support that will have different modes of delivery. You will have an AP PRU that is working on the mainstream curriculum and there will be things that they need to be held accountable for, but that PRU might commission part of a student's timetable out of school, that is non-curriculum, and then you might have something that is a short-term, temporary turnaround.

Chair: The kitemark idea is a good idea.

Q194 Emma Hardy: I am going to start by reading something that I am sure you already know, which is, "Excluded children are twice as likely to be in care of the state, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need, 10 times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems and children in alternative provision are particularly vulnerable". Do you think it is appropriate, Chaz, to tell these children they are privileged to have to attend alternative provision because their needs could not be met in maintained state schools?

Chaz Watson: What I meant about privilege is that if they are in education and they are coming out of education for that day, someone is believing in them and investing in them because they are going to come out with a qualification. That is working alongside the school to support that learner. I appreciate what you are saying about how that message might come across, but for the learner, for that day that they are with us, they feel that is a privilege and they can see what they are achieving. When we look at numbers of students from various different backgrounds, a variety of things that could have happened in their life, for one reason or another that is why education has not worked. We are



not just working on that privilege of them doing construction skills with us; we are working on the whole package of everything that is going on with that young person.

Q195 Emma Hardy: You mentioned that you have a zero tolerance to behaviour. Do you think that is a suitable approach for the children that you care for? Who actually comes to judge the pedagogy and the way that these children are taught? You mentioned earlier about children being visual learners and I was under the impression that the idea of visual, kinaesthetic and auditory learning was discounted a number of years ago.

Chaz Watson: Okay, so zero tolerance from the day that I have been working in alternative provision—the reason why I opened up alternative provision was because I looked at alternative provision 10 years ago and I felt that I needed to open something up. I have lived in the red for the 10 years; I have credit-carded out; I have done everything I possibly can. This is from in here. This is not a financial gain; this is me giving something back. What I believe is that zero tolerance is something that was missing in my life and I feel that it really works with the learners that I am working with because there is a lot of inconsistency in their life. The learners I am working with are always looking for boundaries.

In regards to visual learning, they are seeing what they are achieving. I can give you an example. We do City and Guilds qualifications. If I bring a bundle of paperwork out like this and say, "This is the amount of paperwork you are going to need to do to achieve this," they are going to be scared of it. However, what I do is take half of that away, which is the right amount that they need to do to achieve that, and visually they are seeing that, "I have only got to do half of that, man. Yes, I can do that." So it is about that reverse psychology and the whole environment that you try to create while you have that learner with you—the trust, the boundaries and taking responsibility—even to the point of moving into post-16.

We talked about moving into further education from September last year and we visited colleges in November of last year. We did not take them; our learners met us at the college. We encouraged them to make their own way there—take responsibility. However, I am not targeting my learners to go back into full-time education post-16 because unfortunately they have failed in that environment. We are trying to prepare them in the time that we have with them. However, I have targeted them for apprenticeships and a lot of my learners have looked at apprenticeships and are trying—

Q196 Chair: Do you do data for all the outcomes of your students?

Chaz Watson: We do, yes. We track them.

Q197 Chair: Can you give us some of that?

Chaz Watson: I don't have it to hand with me now.



Q198 **Chair:** Do you know roughly what percentage of your students go on to positive destinations, either additional education or apprenticeships or jobs?

Chaz Watson: I can honestly say to you that about 80% of my learners will leave us and go into further education, but what we have noticed is that after three or four months, because of the support and the independence they need to have in the education or college, unfortunately they fail. That is why this year we are targeting apprenticeships. However, I am still finding problems because for the trade that they are looking at they need to be 18-plus, so there is a grey area, a gap.

Q199 **Emma Hardy:** Do you think that the zero tolerance and the way that you have set your college up is actually not helping learners in your place become independent or independent enough to survive outside of that environment?

Emma Bradshaw: We commission Chaz. His outcomes are very good. He does build constructive relationships. Lots of the young people we are talking about have attachment issues or have had lots of things going on. A lot of them have had poor role modelling. For 90% of the young people who get referred to the PRU, domestic violence is in their profile somewhere. I took Ofsted to SILC. Two years ago there was a focus on AP and what they saw is someone building quality relationships that invest time. Sometimes with how Chaz comes across you are picking up that he is very black and white, he is very clear-cut, but he is not. They go back again and again. Yes, the boundaries are in place, but young people who are in the type of circumstances that you have described need structure, and structure is really important, but they need people to build relationships.

Q200 **Emma Hardy:** I don't think anyone is saying children do not need structure. If you heard the evidence from the previous panel you could definitely hear that from the evidence that David and Claire gave. Neither of them were talking about having a school without structure. What they were talking about was creating an inclusive, welcoming environment that saw each child as an individual and helped each child develop and transition into college—

Emma Bradshaw: You would see that if you went there.

Emma Hardy: That is what they were talking about, not talking about there being a free-for-all and no structure.

Chaz Watson: Okay, and I appreciate what you are saying. In PRU this week, we had difficulties with our weather and my learners were phoning their schools, finding out that their schools were shut. If the environment that we are setting up is not a welcoming environment, why were my learners phoning us to make sure they could still come in to us? The environment that we are setting for them is consistent, safe and they actually feel love. That is the biggest thing.



Q201 Thelma Walker: What would you say are the three main things that are preventing you from meeting the needs of all your young people and children?

Chaz Watson: Finance would be at the top of the list. Also consistency, because a lot of the learners that I am working with might have seven or eight different social workers in the space of six months. I think belief, in society—I think that is the biggest thing.

Emma Bradshaw: Funding is an issue, and for me the funding in schools and the gradual whittling away of those pastoral and support networks that are out there. We are increasingly having the same funding and coping with a higher range of need. There are significant issues in communities and it is vital to have additional support to work with families and communities. We have an outreach team that will work with all of the children. We have access to psychological support, but the amount of money that you can invest in dealing with what is behind the behaviour has got less. That holistic approach is vital. Working collectively with the authority to look at the local clinical commissioning group, the SEN panel and money that is in that, alongside social care and criminal justice—that is where all of those things need to come together.

Thelma Walker: So funding is coming through, as on the previous panel as well?

Emma Bradshaw: And putting that in different pots, rather than bringing it together.

Q202 Thelma Walker: So it is preventing the early intervention. What about safeguarding?

Emma Bradshaw: Safeguarding is a significant issue but for us it is our meat and drink, as was heard from the previous panel. That is what we spend our time on—making those young people and children feel safe, whether emotionally or physically. All of those things have to happen before they can learn.

Q203 Thelma Walker: To do that, you have to have appropriately trained staff, and again we are at full circle here with funding for training.

Emma Bradshaw: We prioritise that. In our organisation we would prioritise that. We have staff who go out into the AP providers we use and we deliver our own safeguarding training. They also come to us when we internally run safeguarding training and access that. I do think it is an issue in the sector, where we have taken responsibility for that, but others will not necessarily have done that.

Q204 Thelma Walker: And the physical setting of the provision as well?

Joanne Southby: It is very variable. The facilities at the PRU that I am currently in are second to none. We have very good facilities. I came from an outstanding PRU, where I worked previously, where we had seven small sites. I rented one of them for £1 a year. That gives you an



idea of the kind of quality we are talking about. One of them had only brown running water, the toilets did not flush and my deputy's main role was to deal with boilers and building issues, because that is what I had been given and there was nothing else available. On one occasion we were evicted, with two weeks' notice, from a site because a mainstream school needed it, and we had to drive around the local area to find another building. It is very variable in the sector.

Colin Jeffrey: To go back to the point about early intervention, because that came across strongly earlier on, it is not just funding that inhibits that; it is also the fact that if a student is placed in alternative provision, their attendance measures are still attached to the school—all the criteria are still held by the school. In terms of Progress 8, if we look at our Achieve club programme, our alternative curriculum, which students are engaging with in schools, is not counted as having any weight by schools. The schools that are delivering it recognise that overall it is worth taking a hit year because this is better for the student in the longer term and is going to support transition out of education into work. There are a few issues that inhibit the early intervention of the application of some alternative provision that could have much greater benefit if it was used earlier when looking at the whole journey of a young person.

Joanne Southby: One key issue that we have seen, and I am sure everyone else has probably seen the patterns, is the trajectory of exclusions of children who have unmet special educational needs, and that seems to be increasing.

One of the barriers we find is that we have a lot of young people come to us at a point where schools are saying, "This child is not suitable for mainstream," and although there has been intervention work in the school, the EHC process has not been started, and so they come to us. We are very reliant on timely information from schools. They also can fall through the net where it may be that the school has arranged for an educational psychologist to do an assessment with the child, but because they have been permanently excluded, that stops. We then have to wait for that to come about again and the child is in limbo, waiting for assessment, not suited to being in alternative provision long term because they actually require specialist provision, but we do not hold the information and we are reliant on the mainstream schools to provide it or to move that process forward. Once the child is no longer on their roll, with the best-practice schools will absolutely engage with my SENCO to move that process on, but there are occasions where the child is not on that school's roll, they are now with us, we do not hold the information, we are starting with a blank sheet, and we can see that child needs to be in specialist provision, not in alternative provision.

Q205 **Chair:** You have sent in evidence, which I quoted in the last session, that, "A watered-down curriculum is seen by pupils and APs as not valuing or respecting them as equal to their peers" and I raised the issue about Ofsted raising the level of qualifications on offer. What is your view



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about all that—I will take, briefly, the view from the panel—and also about the number of untrained, unqualified teachers looking after these pupils?

Joanne Southby: I agree with—

Chair: You agree with what you have said.

Joanne Southby: —with what Claire said. We have to grow our own staff. It is hard to recruit into alternative provision. It is about getting that balance right. You can have the best-qualified teacher, who has a string of qualifications, but they may not be able to engage with young people. Equally, you have some staff who you look at and you bring in in a support role to start with, who have the skills and the personality to engage with young people and really make a difference to their lives. It is about us investing in our staff to ensure they are qualified to deliver a range of different options. The alternative curriculum, and alternative provision, are misnomers. These children are not going to be in an alternative life, an alternative post-16. I certainly do not want them to be ghettoised in any way. They are going to be part of our community, so we have to bring them on board and give them the same opportunities. That means that when we have staff working with them, when we are looking at the curriculum, we need to be able to offer to a comprehensive intake. So we will have some young people who need quite an academic curriculum, and they should not be short-changed because they are in alternative provision.

Q206 **Chair:** What you are saying is that those students are being short-changed.

Joanne Southby: I am saying that they should not be short-changed but they are, to a certain extent, because economies of scale mean that we have a core curriculum and we can offer English, English literature, maths, RE, science, and then we will have options, but we will not have the same range of options.

Chair: Briefly, from the rest of the panel.

Emma Bradshaw: It is a balance. We are not struggling to recruit. We have a strong provision and we get lots of people coming out of mainstream, highly able, and you do need that balance. I might have a young person who has Jim, my English teacher, who is outstanding and superb, and last year managed to get a young person a C grade in six months—he is exactly what they need—but they also go on a Friday to Chaz and they will get their City and Guilds in plastering or construction skills, and that is the destination that they want to reach. You do have to get that balance, but I think historically PRUs were serviced by people who struggled in a mainstream context. That is not the case now. We are held to the same level of account. Exactly what was said in the previous session is true—

Q207 **Chair:** At the moment, it seems to me, alternative provision is failing



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both on the academic side, because only 1% are getting any kind of good GCSEs, and even if you forgo the academics—everyone who knows me knows I am a huge believer in skills in design and technology—50% of those who are leaving alternative provision are NEETs.

Emma Bradshaw: In good alternative provision, that is not the case.

Chair: Yes, but the problem is that there is not enough good alternative provision. That is the purpose of this inquiry.

Emma Bradshaw: For example, if you look in London, three-quarters of the PRUs that are registered and held to account are “good” or “outstanding”, but if you are looking at AP, where people are hiding and they are not registered and held to account, or they are not commissioned by good-quality PRUs, that is where you have your unqualified, untrained staff.

Q208 **Chair:** As we highlighted, yours is not the norm. It does not appear to be, from what we have heard so far.

I very much like the idea of what The Difference has been saying about the way to get trained teachers. Is another way to possibly ask the Government and the Institute for Apprenticeships to have an apprenticeship in alternative provision teaching? Would that be an answer—you were talking about apprenticeships earlier—to get trained people who know how to look after children with difficulties?

Chaz Watson: One of the instructors who is a fully qualified instructor, a plasterer who has done his PTLLS and everything, is one of my ex-students. He came to me nine years ago. He now has his own family. Today he is running the workshop. I have also just taken on a recent one from last year, who is in an apprenticeship four days working with us, one day going to college. What we are trying to create is people who are going to be able to engage with the learners. As we have said, you can have the greatest of qualifications, but sometimes when you are working on the ground with these young people, what you are giving them could be from your own life experiences and so on. That is how we work in our environment.

What I am also looking to, when I expand, what I would love to be able to do, is to talk with local prisons, low-category places where maybe prisoners could be released to work with the young people we are working with. I know that there would have to be everything with regard to safeguarding and CP put in place for that, but that is something that I would like to be able to also work with—local prisons deterring the young people we are working with at the moment from that life and engaging them in looking at a bigger picture and more positive outcomes.

Q209 **Lucy Powell:** A follow-up from what Robert was saying there—Robert, I don’t think you meant to describe it as failure. The statistics would suggest that it is difficult to get outcomes, but what those statistics and that data are not showing is what would have happened to those children



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had they not gone through your provision. We are talking about children who are very likely to end up being NEETs, very likely to get no GCSEs, so it is probably not necessarily fair to say that AP itself is failing those children; the system before that has as well. On that, do you think that some of the data measures, both for yourselves and for mainstream, like Progress 8, are making your life harder and are going to make your life harder in relation to what you are trying to do?

Colin Jeffrey: Progress 8 does inhibit the use of the AP earlier and sooner.

Q210 **Lucy Powell:** You do think it inhibits it sooner?

Colin Jeffrey: Yes; it inhibits the application of it sooner, where it could have more positive impact in helping the young person feel a sense of value and achievement that will support them in the wider school. Even if the AP is part of their curriculum, if it is applied at the right time and in the right way, by staff with the right skills—one of the things that has come across in our own research into our programmes in AP is the absolute importance of the ability to connect and build relationships with young people. It is not until they know you care that they care about what you know. You can be the best algebra teacher on the planet, but if you cannot connect with the young person, all of the skill and ability you have to teach cannot be applied. When we are looking at the skills of staff, we are not looking at a teacher; we are looking at what skills the people have that are being used at the right time for the young person. If someone needs to bolster a sense of self-worth and get their head into a place where they can cope with a classroom environment, we are not after someone who can take them through a full national curriculum; we need someone who can connect with them and help them explore and learn.

Q211 **Lucy Powell:** I am sorry to interrupt, but we are late, so may I have your views on the Progress 8 data question?

Emma Bradshaw: I do think that that is inhibiting. I think you need to look at the sector and think about what are the key things we want; and for me, destination is massive. Do they go? Do they stay? Are we following them up? Are we supporting them? Are we doing more to work with post-16s? Are we creating more post-16 options for this vulnerable group? These things are important.

I had a big argument with an inspector once because I was saying, "If I can get them four at D, or 3 or 4 now in current measures, that will get them on to a level 2 college course and that is where they should be going, that is appropriate progression for that young person, but you are judging me on whether I will get five A to Cs with English and maths." I might have them for 12 months, six months, 18 months, if I am lucky.

Q212 **Lucy Powell:** It needs more context?



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Emma Bradshaw: Absolutely, and it needs to be much more sophisticated. Outcomes: are they ending up in the criminal justice system? Are they ending up in a decent destination?

Q213 **Chair:** Thank you. We are going to have two final questions. Lucy was right to qualify what I said. What I should have said was that the system is failing too many excluded pupils, not necessarily AP, but it is really bad, nevertheless.

Given that there is no support for AP after 16, in an ideal world, a magic-wand world, if you could briefly give a one-sentence answer, what would you do to look after post-16 children who have been excluded?

Joanne Southby: Have an outreach support team that goes with them, post-16. I have a very small team—three staff. It has made a difference between inheriting a PRU that had 86% NEET to having a PRU that every year—

Q214 **Chair:** Where is that outreach team from—from the council?

Joanne Southby: No. I fund it within my own staff team. I use some of my own budget. Now 6% NEET is the maximum we have had in the last three years.

Q215 **Chair:** Chaz, briefly, what should we be doing for post-16 children?

Chaz Watson: I agree that if we can get this support for them for the first year—I know it is a big step—you are going to have more of a positive outcome.

Emma Bradshaw: Absolutely—outreach teams to follow them, which ours currently do, but we need more of it and we struggle—

Q216 **Chair:** Who would run these outreach teams?

Emma Bradshaw: It needs to come from where they have been referred, if they have come from a PRU, for instance. Those relationships are crucial. If Mike, one of my outreach workers, goes back into the college, repairs a row they have had with their tutor or whatever, he can get that sorted for them because they trust him and the family trust him and they have a really strong relationship. It is getting those organisations to follow them up.

Colin Jeffrey: The transition workers in schools need to co-ordinate with local provision, possibly through the local authority, so those students leaving school without a destination pinned down can be flagged and provision can be—

Q217 **Chair:** I met a young girl who had had behavioural issues post-16. I think one of her parents had passed away. She was literally put in a broom cupboard by the school and just told to sit there all day—sit in a dark room all day. Then you guys, The Prince's Trust, came along and now that lady is very, very successful. Should we have more of that? Obviously that requires resources.



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Colin Jeffrey: Also we need to expose young people to the opportunities that are there. If they are not engaged in school, they miss out on a lot of the careers days and the events that happen in school.

Chair: She found out about The Prince's Trust randomly because another teacher told her. There was no set thing, so had that other teacher not told her, she would probably, God forbid, still be sitting in a dark room all day, by herself.

Colin Jeffrey: Yes, but as people start get to 16 they start to take agency over their own life. Then, if the opportunities are presented and they are supported to explore them, whether that is through schools or other professionals who might be giving support, particularly to more vulnerable people—

Q218 **Chair:** Finally, is it possible to create a realistic national outcomes framework for pupils in AP?

Emma Bradshaw: Yes.

Q219 **Chair:** Who should do it? The Government? Local authorities? Schools?

Emma Bradshaw: It needs to come from the Government. It needs to be national, so that you get consistency; otherwise we will get what we have now, which is what you are referring to—in some places it is good and in some places it is not.

Colin Jeffrey: I am not sure you can do it. I think there are massive obstacles to it, the first one being the broad nature of alternative provision and what might be right for a young person at any one time. That is why, going back to the kitemark idea, we have trusted providers whose impact is measured in terms of how they support the student to either re-engage or transition forward. To have a national assessment framework, you would have to really narrow the options to get a framework that was actually useful; otherwise it would not apply very well to certain providers.

Chaz Watson: I would like to add one more thing. What we also need to look at in regards to college, post-16, is that Johnny and Mary come from a PRU and when they go for their interview, sometimes where they have come from can go against them. I have seen that myself. That should not follow them. It should not be judged that way. That is something we really do need to look as well.

Joanne Southby: That is also to do with post-16 providers and how much they are part of the community, the economy of the community, and bringing young people in so they become useful members of society. We are part of a trust that is sponsored by a group of colleges. We very much work closely with them to make sure that our young people are prepared to move to college, and they work closely with us to try to make sure that their staff are equipped to work with our pupils, whatever challenges they might present.



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Chair: It was meant to be final but we have Emma bursting to ask a question.

Q220 **Emma Hardy:** A quick one; it is on the point about the community that you have described. What would you think of some sort of collective responsibility, where all the schools in one area were responsible for all the children; do you think that is a system that could work?

Joanne Southby: I have seen it work in another area I have worked in. I think that is the only way that you raise standards in alternative provision and ensure that our children are not marginalised in society.

Chair: Thank you for your time and really important evidence. We are going to see some alternative provision. If I can, I would like to see yours, Chaz. I thank you for what you do, particularly, if you do not mind me saying, given your story, which you told us. Thank you all very much for all the work. We will reflect your views in our report. Thank you very much.