

Best practice
examples from
specialist, AP
and mixed
school trusts

UPSTREAM

AP &
SEND | THE MAT CEO
NATIONAL
NETWORK



Confederation
of School Trusts

About this paper

In June 2025, the APSEND National Network for MAT CEOs and the Confederation of School Trusts held a joint engagement call for their members, during which they shared plans to develop a strong collective voice with respect to current funding and commissioning challenges in the sector. Both sector bodies were keen to highlight the vital role the specialist sector currently plays, especially in relation to the excellent 'upstream' preventative work that takes place in many trusts across the country through their outreach work. As such, they issued a call for evidence from their members in the form of short case studies focused on their work in this area. This paper presents the findings from that call for evidence and includes 27 case studies from 17 different trusts.

About APSEND

The APSEND National Network for MAT CEOs was formed in 2019 to create a supportive forum for the leaders of specialist Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), whilst also providing a collective voice and strategic representation for the sector.

The membership is comprised of 70 CEOs, who represent a variety of specialist (and mixed) MATs from across the country.

Confederation of School Trusts

The Confederation of School Trusts is the sector body and employer body for school trusts, with nearly 4m children educated in our member schools and academy trusts. We help shape the education policy agenda by speaking on their behalf, bringing together frontline education experts from across the country. We work to drive real, strategic, change for education on the big issues that matter most.

Contents

Foreword	2
Executive Summary	3
Implications for Policy Makers	3
Introduction	5
Theme 1: Early intervention and Outreach models	6
Theme 2: Specialist examples	8
Theme 3: Behaviour and Inclusion Innovations	10
Theme 4: System level innovation	12
Crosscutting theme: Family engagement	14
Crosscutting theme: Commissioning Fragility	16
Crosscutting theme: AP as a Systemic Partner	18
Conclusion	20
Appendix: Early Intervention & Outreach Models	21
1.1: Olive Academies – Tiered Outreach and Inclusive Curriculum	21
1.2: North Star Academy Trust – NS360 Outreach	21
1.3 Enable Inclusion Team (EIT) – Supporting emotional school based avoidance	22
1.4 Respect Collaboration (Derby) – SEMH Advisory Service	22
1.5 River Tees MAT – Reintegration at KS3	23
1.6 River Tees MAT – Careers Inclusion Model	23
1.7 London South East Academies Trust (LSEAT) – Outreach and CPD	23
1.8 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Bailey Street Alternative Provision – Senior Learning Mentor	24
1.9 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Merryfields School – ASC and Sensory Outreach	24
Appendix: Specialist Case Studies	26
2.1 Sheffield Inclusion Centre – Bumble Bee Programme	26
2.2 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Cicely Haughton School – SEMH Outreach	26
2.3 The Howard Partnership Trust – Specialist ASD Outreach and Integration	27
2.4: North Star 265 Alternative Learning Provision	27
2.5 Becton School – Wings Programme	28
2.6 Atomix Trust – Outreach Case Studies	28
2.7 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Adelaide School – SEND-Complex supervision	28
2.8 Consortium Trust – Riverwalk school: training for local mainstream schools	29
2.9 Consortium Trust – The Link Alternative Provision	29
2.10 Consortium Trust – The Broads Specialist Unit	30
Appendix: Behaviour and Inclusion Innovations	31
3.1 RISE Academy – Incident Deconstruction	31
3.2 River Tees Hospital School – Mental Health Inclusion and Outreach	31
3.3 Endeavour Multi Academy Trust – Rainbow Room (Inreach and Outreach)	32
Appendix: System-Level Innovation	33
4.1 Ormiston Academies Trust – Reimagining AP	33
4.2 Alternative Learning Trust – Systemic Reform	33
4.3 Cornwall Pilot	34
4.3a: SIAG – Culture and Decisions	34
4.3b: SIAG – Empowering Support Staff	34
4.3c: SIAG – Impact of Universal Provision	35
4.4 Consortium Trust – MAT wide inclusive ethos on attendance and exclusion	35
4.5 Enable Inclusion Team (EIT) – Reducing Permanent Exclusion Risk	35

Foreword

The case studies in this report reflect the strength of the specialist and alternative provision sector, and its unique contribution to inclusive provision.

The five messages central to the report – building upstream capacity, the importance of stabilising commissioning, embedding family engagement, supporting an evidence culture and recognising the strategic importance of specialist and alternative provision – are important for policy makers as we take forward system reforms.

Trusts are system partners, and it is important that government see them as such.

Together, we can build a system that works for all children – a system in which the unique contribution of all children is valued.

And a system that begins to create more inclusive and socially just schooling.

This is about the kind of society we want to create, because education is the building of who we can be.

Leora Cruddas CBE

Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts

Mark Vickers MBE

Chair, APSEND



Executive Summary

This paper presents the findings from 27 case studies drawn from 17 specialist, alternative provision, and mixed trusts across England. Together, they illustrate the vital preventative work that the sector undertakes in partnership with mainstream schools, families, and local authorities. These case studies highlight how “upstream” interventions can reduce the risk of exclusion, strengthen inclusive practice, and build resilience across the system.

The examples have been organised into four themes:

- **Early Intervention & Outreach Models:** Outreach staff in mainstream schools, reintegration programmes, and careers-focused preventative interventions.
- **Specialist Case Studies:** Therapeutic and nurture provision in specialist schools, outreach from special schools, and targeted specialist-led interventions.
- **Behaviour & Inclusion Innovations:** Relational and restorative practice, reflective incident deconstruction, and culture change support for mainstream schools.
- **System-Level Innovation:** Large-scale, multi-agency pilots, MAT-wide reforms, and data-led initiatives.

Three cross-cutting themes also emerge:

- **Family Engagement:** Effective practice consistently involves parents and carers as equal partners.
- **Commissioning Fragility:** Many impactful initiatives are undermined by short-term funding cycles.
- **AP as a Systemic Partner:** Across all themes, AP is reframed as upstream capacity for the system, not a last-resort placement.

Implications for Policy Makers

The collective message is clear: the specialist sector is already delivering preventative, upstream interventions that work. With sustained commissioning, stronger evaluation frameworks, and recognition of AP’s strategic role, these models can be embedded more widely to secure better outcomes for pupils and a stronger, more inclusive education system.

As sector-led organisations, both APSEND and CST see it as essential that the vital preventative role of the specialist and AP sector is fully recognised in national policy and funding frameworks. The case studies in this report show that with stable commissioning and robust evidence, trusts can deliver cost-effective interventions that prevent exclusion, improve attendance, and transform pupil trajectories. We urge policy makers to ensure this upstream work is supported, embedded, and scaled so that every child, whatever their needs, can thrive in an inclusive education system.

- **Invest in upstream capacity:** Early intervention through AP and specialist outreach demonstrably reduces exclusions. Commissioning should reflect AP’s preventative role, not only fund last-resort placements.
- **Stabilise commissioning:** Time-limited pilots, even where successful, create fragility and churn. Multi-year, sustainable commissioning arrangements are essential if effective models are to embed.
- **Embed family engagement:** Interventions work best when parents and carers are active partners. Funding and programme design should explicitly build family support into preventative work.
- **Support an evidence culture:** Robust data — such as the attendance and reintegration outcomes from Olive Academies, or system-wide monitoring from the Enable Inclusion

Team — strengthens accountability and makes the policy case. Evaluation should be proportionate but consistent across providers.

- **Recognise AP as a system partner:** AP is not just a destination; it is a strategic resource. National policy should frame AP as a contributor to fair access protocols, system-level inclusion panels, and mainstream school improvement.

Introduction

The education system in England continues to face significant pressures around behaviour, attendance, and exclusions. While the majority of pupils thrive in mainstream settings, too many still experience disrupted learning journeys that lead to suspension, exclusion, or disengagement from school. At the same time, schools are expected to meet increasingly complex needs with stretched resources.

Specialist and alternative provision (AP) trusts work at the intersection of these challenges. They are often portrayed narrowly as providers of “last-resort” placements, but the reality is more complex. Across the country, AP and specialist schools are delivering outreach, training, therapeutic support, and reintegration programmes that prevent exclusion and strengthen inclusive practice in mainstream schools. This upstream, preventative work is vital yet often under-recognised in policy debates.

In response to this gap, APSEND and CST invited specialist, AP and mixed trusts to share examples of their preventative work. Trusts were asked to provide case studies covering project aims, the types of organisations they worked with, commissioning arrangements, and evidence of impact. Twenty-seven case studies were submitted, representing seventeen different trusts and a wide range of interventions.

The purpose of this report is twofold. First, to showcase the preventative role that specialist and AP providers already play across England. Second, to ensure that policy makers understand both the effectiveness of this work and the barriers that limit its sustainability. By drawing together real-world examples, this report provides practical evidence of how upstream interventions can reduce exclusions, build family and school resilience, and embed inclusive practice across education systems.

The following sections present the case studies grouped into four themes — early intervention and outreach, specialist provision, behaviour and inclusion innovations, and system-level reforms — alongside three cross-cutting themes of family engagement, commissioning fragility, and AP as a systemic partner. Each theme is introduced with an overview of the evidence, followed by one in-depth ‘spotlight story’ to illustrate the work in greater detail. The case study overviews that support each theme can be found in the appendix.

Theme 1: Early intervention and Outreach models

This theme brings together interventions designed to provide timely support before exclusion becomes likely. These models place specialist staff into mainstream settings, or offer structured programmes that pupils can access while remaining linked to their home schools. The emphasis is on upstream work: preventing escalation, maintaining relationships with families and peers, and building capacity in mainstream schools to manage complexity.

The case studies show a wide variety of approaches. North Star's NS360 outreach service gives mainstream schools direct access to expertise, while River Tees MAT has developed reintegration pathways and a careers inclusion model. The Senior Learning Mentor programme at Bailey Street demonstrates how targeted pastoral support can sustain engagement. Olive Academies' tiered outreach and inclusive curriculum provide another example of graduated early help.

Enable Inclusion Team's (EIT) new EBSA strand highlights that early intervention is not only about exclusion risk but also about non-attendance driven by anxiety or emotional barriers. By working intensively with families and schools, EIT helped pupils with virtually no attendance re-engage with education, showing that upstream approaches can prevent longer-term disconnection.

Together, these examples underline that early intervention is most effective when it combines direct pupil support, staff development in mainstream schools, and family engagement.

Key findings

- Outreach staff embedded in mainstream (e.g. NS360, LSEAT) strengthen inclusion and prevent escalation.
- Reintegration and targeted programmes (e.g. River Tees MAT, Bailey Street) sustain placements and reduce exclusions.
- Graduated outreach (e.g. Olive Academies) provides flexible support matched to level of need.
- EBSA-focused work (e.g. EIT) shows that early support for non-attendance can transform outcomes when families and schools are engaged together.

Spotlight: Olive Academies

Olive Academies has developed a structured, tiered outreach model designed to reduce exclusions by intervening early with pupils and schools.



The model recognises that not all schools require the same level of support, and not all pupils face the same degree of risk, so provision is organised across three tiers.

At the universal level, Olive provides CPD for mainstream staff. Training sessions focus on inclusive practice, emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), and strategies for improving attendance and behaviour. This is intended to build the capacity of schools to identify and address difficulties before they escalate.

The targeted tier offers small-group programmes for pupils identified as being at risk of exclusion. These sessions aim to develop resilience, social skills, and renewed engagement with learning. They are structured to provide short-term, practical support that can be transferred back into the classroom.

For pupils with the highest level of need, Olive provides intensive one-to-one support. This often includes direct work with families to ensure consistency between home and school, as well as tailored interventions for the individual pupil.

In addition to this tiered model, Olive works with schools to adapt aspects of the curriculum. This strand of the programme recognises that disengagement and behaviour challenges are sometimes linked to a lack of curriculum relevance or accessibility. By making adjustments to the content and delivery of learning, Olive aims to create better opportunities for pupils to succeed and remain engaged.

The data submitted with the case study indicated that 98% of pupils supported through the outreach programme improved their attendance, 96% showed improvements in behaviour, and none were permanently excluded. These outcomes were supported by positive feedback from both schools and families, though the case study did not include independent evaluation.

Taken together, the Olive model shows how outreach can combine capacity-building for schools, direct support for pupils, and curriculum development. It demonstrates how alternative provision can play a preventative role, providing timely interventions that reduce the likelihood of exclusion and improve inclusion in mainstream settings.

Theme 2: Specialist examples

Specialist schools, hubs, and alternative provision play a vital role in preventing exclusion and promoting inclusion through highly targeted therapeutic and nurture-based provision. These interventions focus on emotional regulation, social skills, and relationships — often for pupils with complex SEMH or neurodiverse needs. Many also work outward into mainstream, sharing specialist knowledge and building resilience across the whole system around a child.

The case studies in this section show the range of models in operation. Some, such as Sheffield's Bumble Bee and Becton's Wings programme, offer short-term therapeutic placements that prepare pupils for reintegration. Others, like Cicely Haughton, North Star 265, and The Broads Specialist Unit, provide structured environments that balance small-scale specialist support with continued mainstream links. Outreach programmes from Adelaide, the Howard Partnership Trust, Riverwalk School, and Atomix illustrate how special schools and APs can strengthen mainstream capacity by training staff, co-designing reintegration plans, and modelling strategies. Finally, trauma-informed practice at The Link AP highlights how alternative provision can act both as a safe space for pupils and a resource for system-wide change.

A consistent theme is the involvement of families — whether through parent support groups, coaching, or co-produced plans — which underpins stability and long-term outcomes. However, the sustainability of these approaches often depends on commissioning arrangements, with some constrained by short-term or discontinued funding.

Key findings

- Therapeutic and nurture provision (e.g. Bumble Bee, Wings) can eliminate permanent exclusions and rebuild confidence.
- Outreach from special schools (e.g. Riverwalk, Adelaide, Howard Partnership) equips mainstream staff with practical strategies.
- Specialist AP and hybrid units (e.g. North Star 265, The Link, The Broads) create structured environments while maintaining mainstream connection.
- Family support is integral, with parents engaged through groups, coaching, or collaborative planning.
- Commissioning fragility undermines otherwise effective models, highlighting the need for sustained funding.

Spotlight: Sheffield Inclusion Centre – The Bumble Bee Programme

The Bumble Bee Programme was developed by Sheffield Inclusion Centre as a targeted nurture and therapeutic intervention for primary pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. Its design reflects the recognition that early, upstream work can reduce exclusion by addressing underlying social, emotional, and behavioural needs before they escalate.



The programme provides a short-term placement in a small, structured group. Pupils are assessed using Boxall profiling, which helps staff understand the child's developmental and emotional needs. Daily provision combines therapeutic activities with curriculum learning, with an emphasis on building routines, emotional regulation, and social skills. The model is intentionally time-limited: from the outset, the aim is to return pupils to their mainstream schools with improved readiness to learn.

Families play a central role. Alongside pupil interventions, the programme offers parent support groups. These groups provide advice on strategies for behaviour and emotional regulation, while also giving families a space to share experiences and build networks. This dual focus on pupils and parents reflects the view that sustainable reintegration depends on home-school consistency and family confidence.

The programme is commissioned by Sheffield City Council as part of its inclusion strategy, designed to reduce exclusions in primary schools and provide an alternative to permanent exclusion for younger pupils. It represents a specialist intervention embedded in the wider local system.

The reported outcomes are notable. Between 2016 and 2020, no child who completed the Bumble Bee Programme was permanently excluded. Schools reported increased confidence in supporting pupils with SEMH needs, and families described the programme as both supportive and practical. While the case study did not provide quantitative evidence beyond exclusion rates, the combination of Boxall assessments, school feedback, and parental involvement presents a consistent picture of positive impact.

The Bumble Bee Programme demonstrates how targeted, specialist provision can prevent exclusion by addressing underlying needs and working in partnership with families and mainstream schools. It provides an example of how local authorities and AP can collaborate to deliver upstream interventions that reduce the pressure on schools and prevent escalation into more intensive provision.

Theme 3: Behaviour and Inclusion Innovations

This theme captures innovations in behaviour and inclusion that move beyond sanctions or compliance. These approaches are reflective and relational, focusing on understanding the drivers of behaviour, repairing relationships, and embedding inclusive practice across schools. They encourage staff to see behaviour not as a deficit but as communication, and to respond in ways that strengthen rather than fracture relationships.

The case studies here include work within schools, inreach models, and outreach to mainstream colleagues. RISE Academy shows how reflective incident deconstruction can shift culture and reduce exclusions. River Tees Hospital School demonstrates how expertise in mental health provision can be shared with mainstream staff, building confidence and reducing behaviour incidents linked to anxiety or trauma. Endeavour Multi Academy Trust's Rainbow Room combines inreach and outreach, supporting pupils directly while also coaching staff and families to develop more relational and inclusive practices in their home schools.

Similar elements also appear in other parts of this report — for example, LSEAT's CPD programme and Respect Collaboration's advisory service both included staff coaching to encourage relational practice. This suggests that behaviour and inclusion innovation is not confined to a few specialist projects, but is increasingly becoming a cross-cutting strand of preventative work.

The evidence in this theme is largely qualitative, focusing on cultural change and shifts in staff practice. While harder to capture in discrete metrics, the testimonies show consistent benefits: greater staff confidence, fewer suspensions, and more sustainable inclusion. These cultural changes require sustained commitment but have the potential for long-term impact on school environments.

Key findings

- Reflective deconstruction of incidents (e.g. RISE) helps staff learn from practice and reduces repeat exclusions.
- Inreach and outreach models (e.g. Endeavour MAT's Rainbow Room) can simultaneously support pupils and strengthen mainstream staff capacity.
- Outreach and training (e.g. River Tees Hospital School) build confidence in responding to behaviour linked to SEMH or mental health needs.
- Relational practice strengthens staff–pupil relationships and underpins long-term inclusion.
- Similar elements appear in wider outreach (e.g. Respect, LSEAT), showing this is both a discrete theme and a cross-cutting strand.

Spotlight: RISE Academy – Incident Deconstruction Model

RISE Academy introduced incident deconstruction as a reflective process to help staff learn from behaviour incidents and reduce exclusions. The approach was developed to move away from punitive, sanction-led responses and towards relational strategies that focused on understanding and prevention.



The model involves structured reflective sessions after behaviour incidents. Staff and pupils work through what happened, the factors that led to the incident, and how responses might be improved in future. The purpose is to identify drivers of behaviour and to plan alternative approaches that are less likely to escalate. The process is supported by senior leaders, embedding it within the academy's wider culture rather than treating it as an add-on intervention.

The case study reported that incident deconstruction helped staff to reflect on their practice and respond more effectively to challenging behaviour. It highlighted reductions in repeat incidents and noted that staff felt more confident in handling situations in relational ways.

Although the submission did not provide quantitative data, it offered qualitative evidence of a cultural shift within the academy. Staff were described as more reflective, behaviour was understood in terms of underlying need, and incidents were less likely to result in exclusion.

The RISE case study illustrates how behaviour incidents can be used as opportunities for reflection and improvement. By embedding this practice into everyday routines, the academy created a framework for relational behaviour management that emphasises prevention and inclusion rather than punishment.

Theme 4: System level innovation

This theme brings together large-scale and systemic initiatives that reshape how schools, trusts, and local authorities collaborate to prevent exclusion. Unlike the pupil- or school-level interventions in other themes, these examples focus on system design, governance, and commissioning. The emphasis is on prevention at scale — embedding inclusion into referral pathways, policy frameworks, and decision-making across whole areas.

The case studies demonstrate different ways this can be achieved. Ormiston Academies Trust piloted a bi-borough model that redefined AP as a short-term, preventative intervention with stronger reintegration pathways. The Alternative Learning Trust trialled assessment units and outreach as part of a wider systemic reform to ensure AP functions upstream, not just as a destination. Cornwall's SIAG pilot provided advisory support across a wide range of schools, with three case studies showing how culture, staff empowerment, and universal provision can all be addressed through system-level collaboration. Consortium Trust illustrates how a MAT can embed an inclusive ethos across multiple schools, with measurable reductions in suspensions. Finally, the Enable Inclusion Team (EIT) case study highlights the value of data-led, intensive work with pupils at risk of exclusion, showing how evidence-based models can strengthen system accountability and early intervention.

While the approaches vary, the common message is clear: AP and specialist trusts are not just service providers but strategic partners in shaping local education systems. The sustainability of these models, however, often depends on stable commissioning, joint governance, and political will.

Key findings

Multi-agency pilots (e.g. SIAG, OAT) demonstrate how early, joined-up approaches can reduce exclusions across an area.

Trust and LA-wide reforms (e.g. Consortium, ALT) embed inclusion into mainstream systems and shift organisational culture.

Data-led models (e.g. EIT) strengthen the evidence base, improve targeting, and provide accountability for inclusion.

Commissioning fragility remains a key barrier: several initiatives achieved positive results but risked discontinuation due to short-term funding.

Spotlight: Reimagining Alternative provision in the Bi-Borough

Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) has been working in partnership with Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea to fundamentally reshape the role of alternative provision. Rather than a static endpoint for excluded pupils, OAT has developed a tiered model of upstream and preventative interventions, designed to keep children connected to learning and, where possible, reintegrated into mainstream.



Tier 1 provides an outreach framework for schools, with time-limited in-school support focused on behaviour-for-learning and inclusive pedagogy. This has been particularly important for primary-aged pupils. In 2023/24, three-quarters of pupils supported at this stage remained in mainstream. Building on this success, secondary pilots are underway, and work is expanding to include specialist input for pupils with high-functioning autism.

Tier 2 offers structured five-week placements in managed intervention centres, jointly commissioned by schools and local authorities. Between 65% and 75% of pupils reintegrate successfully into mainstream and remain there after 12 months. A flagship development within this tier is Freston Junction, a bespoke resource provision embedded at Latimer AP Academy, serving 12 pupils with SEMH, autism, and social anxiety. Opened in 2024 with £370,000 of local authority investment, it provides a local solution for complex needs that might otherwise require costly independent placements.

Tier 3 focuses on pupils who need longer-term AP placements. Here, OAT is working with partners such as Steplab to develop a clear model of what outstanding specialist teaching looks like in AP, with an emphasis on both academic and social outcomes.

What makes the model distinctive is its coherence. OAT's Beachcroft and Latimer academies are embedded in a wider inclusion ecosystem, working closely with LA SEN and early help teams, educational psychology, and health services. Commissioning is led by the local authorities, with multi-year arrangements governed through Schools Forums. Rigorous quality assurance processes — including data reviews and joint monitoring of plans — support accountability and continuous improvement.

The outcomes so far are promising. In 2023, 79% of Beachcroft leavers and 68.7% of Latimer leavers moved into education, employment, or training — well above national averages for alternative provision. By prioritising early intervention and creating structured pathways, the bi-borough model interrupts the familiar trajectory from exclusion to marginalisation. Instead, pupils are offered trust, connection, and a bridge back to opportunity.

Crosscutting theme: Family engagement

One of the most consistent lessons from the case studies is that specialist and AP-led work is most effective when families are treated as active partners rather than passive observers. Family engagement improves consistency between home and school, reduces anxiety around transitions, and helps sustain the gains once direct support ends.

Several examples illustrate this point. In the Bumble Bee programme (Sheffield Inclusion Centre), parent groups were run alongside nurture provision for pupils. This meant that strategies for emotional regulation and behaviour were reinforced at home as well as at school, creating shared routines that helped children to stabilise.

The River Tees MAT reintegration model at Key Stage 3 also placed family involvement at the centre. Reintegration plans were co-produced with parents and carers from the outset, ensuring that the phased approach reflected the child's wider circumstances. Families were supported to play an active role in reinforcing routines and expectations at home, which increased the likelihood that reintegration would be sustained.

Similarly, Olive Academies reported that family engagement was particularly critical in its work with pupils experiencing emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). At the most intensive tier of its outreach, staff worked directly with families to rebuild trust in education and reduce barriers to attendance.

Taken together, these examples show that family involvement is not an optional extra but a structural element of effective upstream provision. While the evidence base is mostly qualitative, it consistently highlights parental engagement as a cornerstone of success.

Key findings

- Build family engagement into the model design (groups, coaching, co-produced plans), not as an add-on.
- Clarity on roles/responsibilities at home and school supports attendance, regulation, and reintegration.
- Family involvement is often reported qualitatively; capturing simple, consistent outcome measures (e.g., attendance change, reintegration sustainment) would strengthen the evidence base.

Spotlight: River Tees MAT

River Tees Multi Academy Trust (RTMAT) has developed a reintegration model for pupils at Key Stage 3 who are at risk of, or have already experienced, exclusion from mainstream schools.



The model recognises that successful reintegration depends not only on support for pupils but also on active involvement of families and close collaboration with schools.

The approach begins with detailed planning meetings involving parents or carers, mainstream staff, and RTMAT specialists. Reintegration plans are co-produced, with families contributing their insights into the child's needs and circumstances. This helps to ensure that expectations are realistic and that home and school strategies align. The phased reintegration process allows for gradual increases in mainstream attendance, supported by ongoing communication between all parties.

RTMAT staff provide both direct work with pupils and coaching for mainstream staff. Pupils receive support in developing social and emotional regulation, while teachers are advised on strategies to sustain inclusion. Families are given guidance on how to reinforce routines and learning at home, helping to create consistency across environments.

Commissioned by the local authority, placements at RTMAT are designed to be short-term, with the reintegration programme beginning from the point of admission. The funding arrangement ensures that reintegration is prioritised as an outcome rather than permanent placement in alternative provision.

Evidence from the case study indicates that this co-produced approach improves the likelihood of reintegration being sustained. Families reported feeling more confident and supported, while schools valued the trust's role in coordinating the process. Although the submission did not include quantitative data, the qualitative evidence highlighted the central role of parental involvement in preventing repeat exclusions.

The RTMAT example illustrates that reintegration cannot succeed if treated as a technical process alone. By embedding family engagement into every stage, the trust created a model that is responsive, collaborative, and more likely to achieve long-term success. For policy makers, it underscores the importance of commissioning reintegration programmes that position families as equal partners rather than passive recipients.

Crosscutting theme: Commissioning Fragility

A recurring challenge across the case studies is the fragility of commissioning arrangements. Effective upstream work is often delivered through short-term or pilot funding, creating stop-start provision even where early results are positive. This undermines continuity, staff retention, and schools' confidence in the support available.

The Cornwall SIAG pilot illustrates this clearly. Commissioned as a time-limited local authority project, SIAG demonstrated how advisory support could improve culture, empower staff, and shift schools toward universal provision. Yet its continuation depended entirely on council priorities and short-term budgets, leaving promising approaches at risk of discontinuation.

The challenge also appears in larger-scale reforms. Ormiston Academies Trust's Reimagining Alternative Provision bi-borough pilot showed positive outcomes, with new pathways into AP and reduced exclusions. However, the project highlighted how fragile system-wide reforms can be when different local authorities have divergent priorities and governance arrangements.

At a smaller scale, Adelaide School's SEND supervision pilot provided valuable outreach and reflective space for mainstream colleagues. Feedback from schools was strongly positive, but the one-year contract was not renewed, showing how promising models can end abruptly without longer-term investment.

By contrast, other case studies demonstrate more resilient models. Olive Academies combine local authority core funding with traded services purchased by schools, creating stability while retaining fairness of access. Similarly, North Star's NS360 model uses a centralised access route, balancing LA commissioning with school involvement. These examples suggest that hybrid approaches may help to overcome fragility by diversifying funding streams.

Key findings

- Time-limited funding and annual budget cycles undermine continuity, staff retention, and school confidence.
- Multi-agency pilots like SIAG can demonstrate strong early results, but sustainability is rarely guaranteed.
- Large-scale reforms (e.g. OAT) remain vulnerable where governance and commissioning priorities diverge.
- Mixed commissioning (e.g. Olive, North Star) can stabilise successful models without losing equity of access.

Spotlight: Cornwall SIAG Pilot

Cornwall's Specialist Information Advice and Guidance (SIAG) was established as a local authority pilot to help schools strengthen their inclusive practice. Rather than focusing on individual pupils, SIAG supported leadership teams and staff to reflect on culture, decision-making, and everyday provision. The intention was to reduce exclusion by shifting systems and staff confidence across whole schools.

The pilot generated very different experiences depending on local context. In one small rural primary, SIAG conversations highlighted how staffing levels and multi-academy trust policies constrained leaders' ability to embed inclusion. Change was limited during the pilot, but the process exposed the cultural and structural barriers that any system-wide reform must overcome.

At a large primary school, SIAG training focused on empowering support staff. Teaching assistants received coaching on sensory needs and SEMH strategies, which improved classroom practice and fostered a culture of curiosity. Staff reported greater confidence in supporting anxious pupils, particularly in relation to sensory processing, and collaboration between teachers and TAs became stronger.

A third school entered the pilot seeking help with a single child but, through SIAG input, shifted towards embedding universal provision. Leaders reframed their approach to SEND and SEMH as a whole-school responsibility, supported by strategies that could be applied to all pupils. While at an early stage, the school's SENCO reported growing confidence and a visible move towards preventative practice.

Taken together, these examples show both the promise and fragility of system-level pilots. SIAG demonstrated how reflective dialogue, coaching, and universal strategies can change school cultures, but the project remained time-limited and vulnerable to local authority budget priorities. Without sustained commissioning, the gains risk being partial or temporary, even when schools valued the input.

Crosscutting theme: AP as a Systemic Partner

Another strong cross-cutting message is the way AP and specialist trusts are reframing their role in the education system. Rather than being seen solely as providers of last-resort placements, they are increasingly acting as upstream partners who build capacity in mainstream schools, shape pathways, and inform commissioning.

This is evident across multiple themes. In Theme 1, outreach models such as NS360 and Olive Academies showed AP functioning as early help, supporting mainstream schools before exclusion occurred. In Theme 2, specialist providers such as the Howard Partnership Trust and North Star 265 demonstrated how specialist knowledge and provision could be integrated with mainstream schools through assessment units and planned reintegration.

At the systemic level, several cases made the role explicit. The Alternative Learning Trust presented reforms where AP managed assessment units, provided outreach, and operated Fair Access Protocols in partnership with local authorities. The Ormiston Academies Trust bi-borough pilot tested governance structures that positioned AP as a system-level partner, while the Enable Inclusion Team (EIT) built data infrastructure to inform commissioning decisions across an area. Even the SIAG pilot in Cornwall positioned AP leaders as key contributors in multi-agency discussions.

These examples suggest that reframing AP as part of the inclusion continuum, not just an end point, is both possible and effective. It requires shared governance, consistent referral pathways, and recognition of AP's dual role: both delivering direct interventions and building mainstream capacity.

Key findings

- Reframing AP as preventive capacity—rather than a last-resort destination—improves earlier identification and reduces exclusions.
- System enablers include shared referral criteria, joint governance (FAPs/panels), and lightweight, comparable metrics across schools.
- Data functions (like EIT) help target support and evidence impact, but must be tied to actionable guidance for schools.
- Commissioning should recognise AP's dual role: direct intervention and mainstream capacity-building.

Spotlight: Alternative Learning Trust – Fair Access and Assessment Hubs

The Alternative Learning Trust (ALT) has developed a systemic model that positions alternative provision as an integral part of local education systems rather than a service of last resort. Its approach is designed to demonstrate how AP can contribute upstream by working with mainstream schools and local authorities to prevent exclusion, support reintegration, and manage fair access.



A central element of the trust's model is the use of assessment units. These short-term placements allow for diagnostic assessment of pupils at risk of exclusion, identifying their needs in a supportive setting before reintegration into mainstream or transfer to longer-term provision. This early intervention helps schools and families understand what support is needed and reduces the likelihood of exclusion being the default outcome.

Alongside the assessment units, ALT delivers outreach support to mainstream schools. Specialist staff work directly with teachers to model strategies, advise on adaptations, and help embed inclusive practice. This strand recognises that mainstream capacity is essential if reintegration is to succeed and exclusions are to be prevented.

ALT also plays a key role in operating Fair Access Protocols (FAPs) in partnership with local authorities. By managing referrals and placements transparently, the trust supports equitable access to provision and ensures that AP is part of a coordinated system rather than a fragmented safety net. This governance role reinforces the trust's position as a system partner, not only a provider of places.

Commissioning arrangements involve local authorities working directly with ALT to fund both placements and outreach. Governance structures are collaborative, with mainstream headteachers and local authority officers contributing to decision-making. This ensures that AP is embedded in system-wide planning and accountability.

The case study reported that these reforms reduced exclusions, improved reintegration rates, and reframed AP as part of the inclusion continuum. While detailed quantitative data was not included, schools and local authorities highlighted the value of having AP involved at earlier stages of decision-making and support.

The ALT example illustrates how alternative provision can act as a systemic partner, shaping pathways and governance as well as delivering provision. For policy makers, it demonstrates the potential benefits of commissioning AP not only for direct placements but also for its expertise in assessment, outreach, and system coordination.

Conclusion

This collection of case studies demonstrates that the specialist and alternative provision sector already plays a vital upstream role in strengthening inclusion across the education system.

Through outreach, reintegration programmes, nurture and therapeutic models, culture change initiatives, and system-level reforms, trusts are preventing exclusion, supporting families, and building mainstream capacity.

Three messages stand out from the evidence. First, upstream support works. When specialist expertise is made available earlier — whether through outreach staff, reintegration programmes, or advisory services — schools are better able to keep pupils engaged, and permanent exclusions are avoided. Second, the most effective practice is relational and systemic. Family engagement, reflective behaviour cultures, and partnership with mainstream schools underpin success. Third, commissioning fragility remains a major barrier. Time-limited pilots risk creating churn, even where positive outcomes are demonstrated, and more sustainable arrangements are urgently needed.

What also emerges clearly is the reframing of AP and specialist provision. These case studies do not present AP as a “last resort” destination. Instead, they show trusts acting as system partners: shaping fair access protocols, running assessment units, leading multi-agency pilots, and building data infrastructures. This shift has profound implications for policy. If AP is commissioned and supported as an upstream preventative service, it can reduce exclusions and improve outcomes for pupils while strengthening the system as a whole.

The evidence base here is diverse. Some case studies offer robust quantitative data — for example, measurable reductions in exclusions and improvements in attendance — while others provide strong qualitative evidence of cultural change. Together, they point to a sector that is innovative, adaptive, and essential to the wider system.

For policy makers, the message is clear: investing in the preventative, outreach role of specialist and alternative provision is both effective and necessary. Sustained commissioning, stronger evaluation frameworks, and recognition of AP as a strategic partner will enable this work to continue and grow. The sector has shown what is possible; the challenge now is to secure the policy and funding environment that allows these preventative models to embed and thrive.

Appendix: Early Intervention & Outreach Models

1.1: Olive Academies – Tiered Outreach and Inclusive Curriculum

Project Aims

Olive Academies designed its outreach model to prevent exclusions by addressing issues such as emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), persistent absence, and behaviour challenges before they escalated. The aim was to provide schools with a tiered support structure, combining universal training, targeted interventions, and intensive one-to-one provision, alongside developing a more inclusive curriculum in mainstream schools.

Approach and Provision

The tiered model consisted of three levels: universal CPD for staff, targeted small-group work, and intensive one-to-one interventions. Olive also supported schools to develop inclusive curriculum projects that engaged pupils more effectively and helped them remain connected to learning.

Commissioning Arrangements

The model was funded through a mix of local authority commissioning and direct school contributions, ensuring both systemic access and flexible buy-in.

Impact

Outcomes were strong: 98% of pupils improved attendance, 96% showed behaviour improvements, and none were permanently excluded. Both schools and families reported greater confidence in inclusion.

1.2: North Star Academy Trust – NS360 Outreach

Project Aims

North Star 360 was established to reduce exclusions and suspensions by providing early, preventative outreach directly into mainstream schools. The aim was to build staff confidence in managing SEMH needs, keep pupils engaged, and avoid escalation into AP placements.

Approach and Provision

The outreach team delivered a mix of coaching, observation, and one-to-one interventions. Staff modelled strategies in classrooms, created behaviour and transition plans, and supported pupils at risk of exclusion. The approach was flexible, responding to school and pupil needs, and always framed as short-term support with mainstream retention as the goal.

Commissioning Arrangements

The outreach was commissioned by the local authority with agreement from headteachers. Schools referred pupils at risk of exclusion, and the service was centrally funded, ensuring equitable access across all schools.

Impact

In one academic year, 182 pupils were supported. Schools reported reduced suspensions and exclusions, while staff noted greater confidence in managing SEMH. Parents highlighted improvements in behaviour at home and reduced stress linked to school engagement.

1.3 Enable Inclusion Team (EIT) – Supporting emotional school based avoidance (EBSA) Project Aims

In September 2024, the EIT expanded its work to address Emotional-Based School Avoidance (EBSA). The aim was to help pupils re-engage with school, support families to manage anxiety, and equip staff to sustain attendance.

Approach and Provision

The team worked closely with schools and families to reduce barriers to attendance, providing structured strategies and tailored support. Progress was tracked using attendance data and SDQ scores. Qualitative feedback was collected from parents to understand the wider impact on family life and pupil wellbeing.

Commissioning Arrangements

The team operated as part of the local area's inclusion strategy. The work was embedded into local authority inclusion planning and aligned with other support services.

Impact

The EBSA pilot involved fourteen pupils, of whom eight had completed their programme and six remained active. Attendance improved markedly, rising from virtually no school sessions to an average of more than ten in the fortnight before assessment. Wellbeing also improved, with parent and teacher SDQ scores both moving from the “high” to “close to average” range. Parents reported that their children were more motivated and settled in school, and several noted reduced stress at home as a result.

1.4 Respect Collaboration (Derby) – SEMH Advisory Service

Project Aims

The SEMH & Inclusion Advisory Service was established to provide early, preventative support to mainstream schools across Derby, in order to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions linked to social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. Its central aim was to offer meaningful and timely advice and interventions so that schools could manage challenges before they escalated.

Approach and Provision

The SEMH advisers worked directly with schools, offering a blend of coaching, staff training, and advice for school leaders. The service operated responsively, with the advisers logging interactions and tailoring advice to school context. Schools could access both strategic guidance and practical advice.

Commissioning Arrangements

The service was commissioned jointly by Derby City Council and the Respect Collaboration (a group of local schools). Schools also contributed resources to sustain delivery, ensuring local ownership.

Impact

In its first year, the service recorded 1,522 logged interactions with staff and pupils. Schools reported increased confidence in dealing with SEMH needs, and the service was recognised for reducing reliance on exclusion as a response. The reporting noted strong engagement with schools, but there was limited quantitative data on longer-term outcomes.

1.5 River Tees MAT – Reintegration at KS3

Project Aims

The reintegration programme at River Tees MAT (RTMAT) was designed to support pupils transitioning back from alternative provision into mainstream schools. The aim was to reduce repeat exclusions by ensuring that reintegration was carefully planned, phased, and supported, with families closely involved in the process.

Approach and Provision

Dedicated reintegration coaches worked with pupils, families, and mainstream schools to co-design personalised reintegration plans. Support included pre-transition planning meetings, phased timetables, mentoring during the return period, and continued monitoring after reintegration. Emphasis was placed on building trust with families and ensuring the pupil felt supported rather than “sent back.”

Commissioning Arrangements

The programme was commissioned by the local authority as part of a system-wide reintegration framework. This ensured that reintegration was not left to individual schools but embedded as a consistent pathway across the area.

Impact

The submission highlighted that reintegrations were successful and sustained, with a reduction in repeat exclusions. Parents described feeling reassured and empowered by being directly involved in the reintegration process.

1.6 River Tees MAT – Careers Inclusion Model

Project Aims

River Tees Multi Academy Trust (RTMAT) developed its careers inclusion model to re-engage pupils at risk of exclusion by providing meaningful vocational and careers-focused opportunities. The aim was to improve motivation, strengthen future aspirations, and prevent disengagement from mainstream education.

Approach and Provision

The model integrated vocational tasters, employer engagement, and curriculum pathways aligned to local labour market opportunities. Pupils participated in mentoring alongside curriculum adjustments, ensuring that careers learning was embedded into their everyday education. The approach was explicitly preventative, using careers education as a tool to maintain engagement and reduce exclusion risks.

Commissioning Arrangements

Commissioned in partnership with local authorities and schools, ensuring that provision was targeted at pupils most at risk of exclusion and disengagement.

Impact

The case study reported improved engagement and attendance for participating pupils. Schools noted a reduction in exclusions among pupils accessing the model, while pupils themselves highlighted increased motivation and a clearer sense of purpose.

1.7 London South East Academies Trust (LSEAT) – Outreach and CPD

Project Aims

LSEAT developed its outreach and continuing professional development (CPD) programme to

help mainstream schools build confidence and capacity in supporting pupils with challenging behaviour and SEMH needs. The overarching aim was to reduce suspensions and exclusions by embedding trauma-informed and relational practices in mainstream classrooms.

Approach and Provision

Specialist staff from LSEAT worked directly with mainstream schools, offering targeted outreach support for individual pupils alongside structured CPD sessions for staff. Training covered trauma-informed practice, strategies for managing behaviour, and ways to adapt teaching for pupils with additional needs. Staff also benefited from modelling of strategies within their classrooms.

Commissioning Arrangements

The outreach and CPD programme was supported through local authority funding, with schools also able to commission bespoke CPD packages. This mixed model of funding allowed both system-wide access and flexibility for schools seeking targeted provision.

Impact

The submission highlighted that schools engaging with the outreach and CPD programme reported improved behaviour management, greater staff confidence, and a reduction in exclusions.

1.8 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Bailey Street Alternative Provision – Senior Learning Mentor

Project Aims

The Senior Learning Mentor role was created to reduce exclusions and improve attendance by offering targeted relational support to pupils in mainstream schools who were at risk of disengagement. The aim was to provide a trusted adult who could work with both pupils and families to address barriers early.

Approach and Provision

The mentor worked directly with identified pupils in mainstream settings, focusing on building positive relationships, encouraging attendance, and supporting engagement with learning. In addition to one-to-one support, the mentor liaised with families to improve home-school communication and consistency. The model emphasised flexibility and personalisation, adapting to each pupil's context.

Commissioning Arrangements

The role was commissioned and funded by the local authority, with schools able to request mentoring support for specific pupils. This ensured targeted allocation of resource to those most at risk of exclusion.

Impact

The submission reported improved attendance and re-engagement with learning for the pupils who received mentoring support.

1.9 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Merryfields School – ASC and Sensory Outreach

Project Aims

Merryfields School developed an outreach programme to support mainstream schools in meeting the needs of pupils with autism and sensory processing differences. The aim was to strengthen

staff knowledge, reduce exclusions linked to unmet needs, and build family confidence in mainstream placements.

Approach and Provision

The outreach team provided sensory audits of classrooms, training for staff, and practical strategies to help regulate pupils with ASC.

Commissioning Arrangements

The service was commissioned on a one-year basis by the local authority.

Impact

The submission reported improved confidence among mainstream staff in supporting autistic pupils.

Appendix: Specialist Case Studies

2.1 Sheffield Inclusion Centre – Bumble Bee Programme

Project Aims

The Bumble Bee Programme was established to provide early nurture and therapeutic support for primary pupils at risk of exclusion. The aim was to reduce exclusions by addressing underlying social, emotional, and behavioural needs, and to prepare pupils for successful reintegration into mainstream school.

Approach and Provision

The programme provided short-term placements in small nurture groups, using Boxall profiling to assess needs and track progress. Daily activities combined therapeutic input with curriculum engagement, focusing on emotional regulation, social development, and readiness to learn. Parents and carers were actively involved through support groups.

Commissioning Arrangements

Commissioned by Sheffield City Council as part of its city-wide inclusion strategy, the programme was positioned as an upstream intervention for primary schools.

Impact

Between 2016 and 2020, no pupil who completed the Bumble Bee Programme was permanently excluded. Schools reported improved capacity to support pupils with SEMH needs, and parents valued the family engagement element.

2.2 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Cicely Haughton School – SEMH Outreach

Project Aims

Cicely Haughton School set up an early inreach programme for pupils in KS1 and lower KS2 who were struggling in mainstream school. The aim was to provide targeted SEMH support at an early stage, while keeping pupils linked to their home school, so that long-term exclusion could be avoided.

Approach and Provision

Pupils attend the resource base for four sessions each week — two mornings and two afternoons — but remain on roll at their mainstream school. Groups are kept small, with up to eight children supported by one teacher and two teaching assistants. The focus is on developing self-awareness, social skills, self-control, behaviour management, and readiness for learning. Each child has a personalised learning plan, and progress is tracked using the Boxall Profile.

Commissioning Arrangements

The programme is commissioned and funded by the local authority, with schools contributing £25 per session through the LA. It has been running for six years, with contracts renewed on a three-year cycle.

Impact

Since the programme began, 87 pupils have completed placements. Of these, 54 reintegrated successfully into their mainstream classes (including two with EHCPs), 10 secured EHCPs and moved on to specialist schools, four moved out of area, 17 had placements terminated, and two were permanently excluded. This means that over 80% of pupils returned to mainstream, with a further 11% moving on to appropriate specialist settings. Boxall assessments also show clear

progress: for example, more than 80% of pupils improved in self-awareness, social skills, and self-control. Recent cohorts showed 100% progress across all developmental strands when reassessed.

2.3 The Howard Partnership Trust – Specialist ASD Outreach and Integration

Project Aims

The Howard Partnership Trust (THPT) developed its ASD outreach service to improve the inclusion of pupils with autism in mainstream schools. The aim was to prevent exclusions and placement breakdowns by providing specialist advice, direct intervention, and a structured model for integrating pupils into mainstream classrooms.

Approach and Provision

The service combined outreach from specialist staff with tailored support for individual pupils. Interventions included classroom observation, advice on environmental adaptations, and modelling of strategies for teachers. Staff also worked with pupils and families to plan phased integration into mainstream settings. A strong emphasis was placed on collaboration between schools, families, and the specialist team.

Commissioning Arrangements

The outreach was commissioned as part of a wider local inclusion strategy, with resources provided by the trust and contributions from schools accessing the service.

Impact

The submission reported positive outcomes, including improved attendance, better family engagement, and reductions in exclusions for pupils with ASD. Schools valued the specialist expertise and described increased confidence in supporting autistic pupils.

2.4: North Star 265 Alternative Learning Provision

Project Aims

North Star 265 was developed as a short-stay alternative learning provision (ALP) to provide an upstream intervention for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. Its aim was to stabilise placements, address underlying needs, and prepare pupils either for successful reintegration into mainstream or for a planned transition to a more specialist setting.

Approach and Provision

The ALP offered a structured, small-scale environment with a strong emphasis on therapeutic support and personalised learning. Staff worked closely with pupils to identify barriers to engagement and designed individual learning plans that combined academic study with social and emotional development. The provision was intended as a short-term intervention, with reintegration planning beginning from the point of admission.

Commissioning Arrangements

Commissioned by the local authority as part of the North Star Academy Trust's wider offer, placements at NS265 were funded centrally, with referrals made through an admission referral from the Local Authority or admission panel.

Impact

The case study highlights improved engagement and attendance among pupils, alongside reductions in behavioural incidents. Schools reported that reintegrated pupils were more settled and better able to access mainstream learning.

2.5 Becton School – Wings Programme

Project Aims

The Wings Programme at Becton School was designed to support pupils with medical and mental health needs who were struggling to remain engaged in mainstream school. Its aim was to provide a short-term, specialist intervention that addressed barriers to attendance and learning, and to prepare pupils either for reintegration or for transition to a more appropriate setting.

Approach and Provision

The Wings Programme offered structured, small-group provision in a supportive environment. It combined therapeutic input with tailored teaching, helping pupils rebuild confidence and resilience. The programme worked closely with mainstream schools to ensure continuity and to prepare reintegration plans where possible. Staff also engaged with families to strengthen home-school links.

Commissioning Arrangements

Commissioned by Sheffield Children's Hospital School (Becton), the Wings Programme formed part of a wider package of specialist provision for pupils with health-related barriers to attendance. Placements were arranged through partnership with schools and local services.

Impact

The case study reported that the programme supported pupils to re-engage with education, thus improving attendance and reducing the risk of exclusion. Schools valued the specialist expertise in mental health, and parents highlighted the reassurance provided by the structured, small-scale setting.

2.6 Atomix Trust – Outreach Case Studies

Project Aims

Atomix provides a highly personalised pathway for young people who have struggled to thrive in mainstream education. The trust's aim is to rebuild confidence, nurture aspirations, and help pupils progress into further education, employment, and independent living.

Approach and Provision

The model is centred on tailored support that recognises each student's context, strengths, and barriers. Provision includes flexible teaching, strong pastoral care, mentoring, and help with transitions into adulthood. Atomix also works closely with families, ensuring wraparound support that addresses both academic and personal needs.

Commissioning Arrangements

Atomix operates a blend of commissioned placements and standard funding routes, with provision Trust-led and placements funded through established alternative provision mechanisms.

Impact

The strongest evidence comes through individual pupil journeys. Across the examples provided, pupils who had faced exclusion, mental health challenges, or instability progressed into higher education, vocational training, apprenticeships, or employment. Parents also reported dramatic improvements in their children's wellbeing and confidence.

2.7 Manor Hall Academy Trust: Adelaide School – SEND-Complex

supervision

Project Aims

Adelaide School highlighted its work on “SEND–Complex supervision,” aiming to provide outreach and training to local mainstream schools in order to strengthen their capacity to meet complex needs.

Approach and Provision

Last academic year, Adelaide and other special schools in Cheshire East were commissioned to deliver outreach support and training for mainstream colleagues. This included supervision and advice around SEND and complex needs.

Commissioning Arrangements

Initially the programme was commissioned by Cheshire East local authority. The local authority has not recommissioned the service.

Impact

The submission notes that feedback from schools exists but that the trust would need support to collect systematic impact data in future.

2.8 Consortium Trust – Riverwalk school: training for local mainstream schools

Project Aims

Riverwalk, a special school within the trust, aimed to share specialist expertise with local mainstream staff to improve inclusion.

Approach and Provision

The school provided free training for local schools in autism, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), and sensory approaches. This enabled mainstream colleagues to better meet the needs of children with complex SEND.

Commissioning Arrangements

The training was offered directly by the special school to local partners, funded through the trust’s outreach commitment.

Impact

Mainstream teachers reported greater confidence and improved strategies in managing complex needs. Feedback indicated stronger collaboration between special and mainstream schools.

2.9 Consortium Trust – The Link Alternative Provision

Project Aims

The Link AP was developed as a trauma-informed and neurodiversity-aware provision to re-engage pupils at risk of exclusion and to build mainstream capacity.

Approach and Provision

Provision included a broad curriculum, therapeutic support, and enrichment opportunities. Outreach staff supported mainstream colleagues to adopt trauma-informed practice.

Commissioning Arrangements

The Link was funded as an alternative provision within the trust, with referrals from local schools.

Impact

Pupils accessed a more personalised curriculum and were supported to reintegrate where possible. Mainstream staff reported improved understanding of trauma-informed and relational approaches.

2.10 Consortium Trust – The Broads Specialist Unit

Project Aims

The Broads Specialist Unit was created to provide small-group specialist provision while keeping pupils connected to their mainstream primary school.

Approach and Provision

The unit delivers targeted support for pupils with complex SEND in a separate space on the school site. Pupils remain part of the mainstream school community, attending assemblies and shared activities.

Commissioning Arrangements

The unit is trust-funded and integrated into the local primary, with places allocated through school and trust processes.

Impact

Pupils received more tailored support while maintaining a sense of belonging in their mainstream school. Parents reported greater satisfaction with the balance of inclusion and support.

Appendix: Behaviour and Inclusion Innovations

3.1 RISE Academy – Incident Deconstruction

Project Aims

RISE Academy introduced its incident deconstruction process to improve staff practice and reduce exclusions. The aim was to move beyond punitive responses to challenging behaviour by helping staff reflect on incidents, identify underlying causes, and develop more relational and preventative strategies.

Approach and Provision

The model involves structured reflective sessions after behaviour incidents. Staff and pupils are encouraged to deconstruct what happened, why it happened, and what could be done differently in future. This reflective process is supported by senior staff, creating a culture where behaviour incidents are learning opportunities rather than simply triggers for sanctions. The approach focuses on understanding drivers of behaviour, repairing relationships, and preventing repeat issues.

Commissioning Arrangements

The deconstruction process was embedded internally as part of RISE Academy's culture, rather than commissioned as a separate service. It represents a school-level innovation within the wider academy trust.

Impact

The academy reported reductions in repeat incidents and improved staff confidence in managing behaviour. Pupils were more engaged in restorative conversations, and staff described feeling better equipped to respond relationally. The trust is now piloting the process in one of its mainstream schools.

3.2 River Tees Hospital School – Mental Health Inclusion and Outreach

Project Aims

The River Tees Hospital School set out to improve how mainstream schools support pupils with significant mental health needs, particularly when they are transitioning back from hospital or alternative provision. The focus was on equipping staff to respond with greater understanding and confidence, reducing stigma, and making reintegration more sustainable.

Approach and Provision

The school shared its expertise in supporting pupils with acute mental health challenges by working directly with mainstream colleagues. Staff delivered training based on practical experience and the trust's Relational Behaviour Framework, and offered coaching and consultation to embed new approaches. Partnerships were central: the programme was developed alongside CAMHS, local authority teams, educational psychologists, and voluntary sector partners to provide wraparound support. This ensured that mainstream schools could adapt their culture and practice, as well as access consistent guidance during reintegration.

Commissioning Arrangements

The work was commissioned by Middlesbrough and Redcar local authorities and designed jointly with mental health and social care professionals to ensure it met local need.

Impact

Although no quantitative data was provided, schools reported that staff became more confident in recognising and responding to pupils with mental health difficulties. Reintegration was smoother, attendance improved, and behavioural incidents linked to mental health challenges reduced. The programme also laid the foundations for scaling, with plans for role-specific training modules and broader local authority coverage.

3.3 Endeavour Multi Academy Trust – Rainbow Room (Inreach and Outreach)

Project Aims

The Rainbow Room was established by Two Rivers Primary School, in partnership with other Tamworth schools, to provide specialist therapeutic support for pupils with complex social, emotional, and communication needs. Its dual purpose is to meet individual children's needs while strengthening the capacity of mainstream schools to deliver inclusive education. The Rainbow Room at Two Rivers Primary School exemplifies a model of inclusive, therapeutic education that is both child-centred and system-strengthening. By combining targeted intervention with professional development and holistic collaboration, it not only transforms individual lives but also enhances the capacity of mainstream schools.

Approach and Provision

Housed within Ankermore Primary Academy, the Rainbow Room operates as an extension of Two Rivers rather than as an alternative provision. Pupils remain on the roll of their mainstream schools, with referrals coordinated through the local SEND Hub. The provision offers two pathways:

Pathway 1 (short-term): observation, advice, and training for school staff alongside targeted support for pupils to reduce anxiety and build self-esteem.

Pathway 2 (longer-term inreach/outreach): typically one day a week for 10 weeks, including animal therapy, sensory integration, and structured communication programmes.

Alongside direct support, mainstream teachers and teaching assistants are upskilled through consultation, SENDCO meetings, and hands-on involvement in the inreach provision. Outreach visits extend this support into mainstream classrooms, where staff model strategies and provide advice. Parents and carers are engaged throughout the process, contributing to planning and review.

Commissioning Arrangements

Access is organised via the SEND Hub to ensure transparent and needs-led referrals. The Rainbow Room is funded as part of the local SEND system, with mainstream schools retaining responsibility for pupils on their roll.

Impact

In 2022–23, 39 pupils from 19 schools accessed the Rainbow Room; this rose to 52 pupils from 20 schools in 2023–24. Pupils showed measurable improvements in wellbeing and engagement, assessed via Leuven Scales and Boxall Profiles, and most returned successfully to mainstream classes. Schools praised the facility as one they could not replicate in-house, and parents consistently reported that their children felt safe, supported, and happier. Pupils themselves described it as “awesome” and expressed enthusiasm to attend.

Appendix: System-Level Innovation

4.1 Ormiston Academies Trust – Reimagining AP

Project Aims

Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) developed its “Reimagining Alternative Provision” project to reform how AP operates across two local authorities. The aim was to move away from AP being seen as a last resort and instead create a preventative, system-level model that supports pupils earlier and more flexibly.

Approach and Provision

The project established new pathways into and through AP, with a stronger focus on early assessment and reintegration. OAT worked with local authorities and mainstream schools to design a model where AP acted as a short-term intervention, with structured reintegration plans and close monitoring of pupil progress. The project also tested collaborative approaches to commissioning and governance across the bi-borough system.

Commissioning Arrangements

Commissioned jointly by two local authorities in partnership with OAT, the project was funded as a systemic pilot. Governance structures included representation from AP leaders, mainstream heads, and local authority officers.

Impact

The submission reported that the new model supported more pupils to reintegrate successfully into mainstream schools, reduced the use of permanent exclusion, and improved consistency in commissioning decisions. It also provided learning about the challenges of scaling reforms across different local authorities with varying priorities.

Beyond the quantitative gains, the bi-borough model is underpinned by a clear moral purpose and system coherence: AP sits within a wider inclusion ecosystem (SEN, early help, EP, health) rather than as an endpoint. The approach aligns with national evidence and policy (DfE 2024 AP thematic review; CSJ AP Quality Toolkit). Next-step development includes embedding specialist autism expertise within Tier 1 outreach, so behaviour support is directly informed by underlying need.

4.2 Alternative Learning Trust – Systemic Reform

Project Aims

The Alternative Learning Trust (ALT) developed a set of reforms to position AP as a preventative, system-wide partner. The aim was to demonstrate that alternative provision could play a role upstream by supporting pupils and schools before exclusion occurred, rather than only providing placements after breakdown.

Approach and Provision

ALT’s reforms included creating assessment units to provide short-term, diagnostic placements; delivering outreach to mainstream schools; and supporting the operation of Fair Access Protocols to ensure equitable admissions. The trust worked closely with local authorities and mainstream schools to embed these approaches into wider systems.

Commissioning Arrangements

Commissioning was agreed with local authorities, with a mix of centrally funded placements and additional commissioned outreach. Governance structures involved collaboration between ALT

leaders, mainstream headteachers, and local authority officers to ensure a joined-up approach.

Impact

The case study reported that the reforms reduced exclusions, improved reintegration rates, and reframed AP as part of the inclusion continuum. Schools valued the support from assessment units and outreach services. The submission positioned ALT as a system partner, providing examples of how AP can reshape its role nationally.

4.3 Cornwall Pilot

Framing note – Cornwall SIAG Pilot

Specialist Information Advice and Guidance (SIAG) in Cornwall was established as a local authority-commissioned pilot to provide system-level support across mainstream schools. Its purpose was to help schools develop more inclusive cultures, equip staff with strategies for SEMH and SEND needs, and reduce exclusion by embedding preventative practice.

The three case studies that follow come from schools involved in the pilot. Taken together, they demonstrate the breadth of SIAG's work: identifying cultural barriers to inclusion, empowering support staff to play a greater role, and helping schools move from reactive to universal provision. The outcomes vary across settings, but each offers insight into how a system-wide pilot can be experienced on the ground.

4.3a: SIAG – Culture and Decisions

Project Aims

A small rural primary school engaged with SIAG to review decision-making and staff culture around inclusion. The aim was to explore barriers that limited the impact of SEND and SEMH strategies.

Approach and Provision

SIAG provided reflective conversations with senior leaders and reviewed how staffing levels and MAT policies influenced practice. The work highlighted constraints on capacity and culture, particularly around exclusions and behaviour management.

Commissioning Arrangements

This case formed part of the Cornwall-wide SIAG pilot commissioned by the local authority.

Impact

The school reported limited change during the pilot period. Barriers such as rigid MAT expectations and a lack of specialist capacity restricted the implementation of SIAG's recommendations. However, the engagement provided valuable insights into the conditions that need to be in place for system-level initiatives to take root.

4.3b: SIAG – Empowering Support Staff

Project Aims

A large primary school asked SIAG to strengthen the role of teaching assistants in supporting pupils with SEMH and SEND. The aim was to increase staff confidence and improve everyday classroom practice.

Approach and Provision

SIAG delivered training focused on sensory needs and SEND strategies, alongside coaching and reflective discussions with staff. This helped create a culture of curiosity and improved collaboration between teachers and support staff.

Commissioning Arrangements

This case formed part of the Cornwall-wide SIAG pilot commissioned by the local authority.

Impact

Staff reported greater confidence in supporting pupils, particularly in managing anxiety and behaviour linked to sensory processing. The school also noted a more consistent and positive culture around inclusion.

4.3c: SIAG – Impact of Universal Provision

Project Aims

A mid-sized primary initially sought support for an individual pupil, but through engagement with SIAG reframed its approach to focus on universal provision. The aim was to embed inclusive practice across the school rather than relying on ad hoc interventions.

Approach and Provision

SIAG worked with leaders and staff to shift entrenched thinking about SEND and SEMH. The advisory group provided strategies that could be applied universally, supporting all pupils rather than just those with identified needs.

Commissioning Arrangements

This case formed part of the Cornwall-wide SIAG pilot commissioned by the local authority.

Impact

The school's new SENCO reported increased confidence, and staff began to apply universal strategies more consistently. While early in development, the work marked a shift towards a preventative, whole-school approach.

4.4 Consortium Trust – MAT wide inclusive ethos on attendance and exclusion

Project Aims

Consortium Trust developed a trust-wide inclusive ethos to reduce suspensions and exclusions and improve attendance, ensuring consistency of approach across schools.

Approach and Provision

The trust established clear policy expectations and invested in SENDCos, pastoral staff, and behaviour leads. Outreach from AP colleagues supported schools in responding earlier to need.

Commissioning Arrangements

The approach was trust-led, embedded across the MAT's schools as part of internal improvement strategy.

Impact

Suspensions reduced by 33% in one year across the trust. Leaders reported improved consistency in inclusive practice and stronger support for vulnerable pupils.

4.5 Enable Inclusion Team (EIT) – Reducing Permanent Exclusion Risk

Project Aims

Enable Inclusion Team's (EIT) Reducing Permanent Exclusion Risk project was established to provide intensive support for pupils identified as being at high risk of permanent exclusion. The aim was to reduce exclusions, improve attendance, and strengthen wellbeing, while building

capacity in schools and families to maintain progress.

Approach and Provision

The team worked with schools to assess pupils' needs, implement targeted strategies, and monitor progress over time. Support included close liaison with families, coaching for staff, and structured use of assessment tools such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and a bespoke "PEx Risk Score." Interventions were typically long-term, with an average duration of 206 days (around 20 to 30 sessions).

The team operated as part of the local area's inclusion strategy. Commissioning details in the submission are limited, but the work was embedded into local authority inclusion planning and aligned with other support services.

Impact

In total 57 pupils received support, 94.8% were not permanently excluded, PEx Risk Scores dropped significantly pre- to post-intervention (n=23), with improvements sustained at three months. Parent and teacher SDQ scores improved from "very high" to "high" from pre- to post-intervention (3-month follow-up data is not currently available due to low N). Attendance improved, and suspensions fell sharply (with one outlier noted). 12 young people EIT worked with had social care involvement at pre-intervention, by post-intervention only four young people were still under social care.

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