



Department  
for Education

# **Creating opportunity for all**

**Our vision for alternative provision**

**March 2018**

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## **Secretary of State Foreword**

Every child, no matter their background, needs or where they live, deserves an excellent education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

For some children, their health needs or circumstances mean that they are not able to attend a mainstream or special school, and are educated in alternative provision (AP). It is vital that we ensure that these children, who are often some of the most disadvantaged, are offered equal opportunities to make the most of their talents and become successful adults.

There are many examples of remarkable AP settings, thanks to the dedication and passion of many inspiring teachers. However, too many children in AP disengage from education and are not ready for the next stage of their lives when they leave.

Our vision is to ensure that all AP settings provide high quality education and that the routes into and out of AP settings work in the best interests of children. We will do this by working collaboratively with partners across the education sector to build a strong evidence base and deliver reforms that enable mainstream and special schools to support children to remain and reintegrate into their settings, promote collective responsibility for delivering a high quality education in AP and ensuring young people leaving AP have choices about what they do next.

This roadmap for reform provides a plan for action to transform the lives of all children in AP, in a country where AP is truly recognised as an integral part of the education system.

**Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP**

**Secretary of State for Education**

# Creating opportunity for all

## *Our vision for alternative provision*

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*Every child deserves an excellent education and the chance to fulfil their potential, whatever their background, needs or location in the country. Children in alternative provision deserve these opportunities too.*

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### **Our ambitions are to ensure:**

1. The right children are placed in alternative provision;
  2. Every child in alternative provision receives a good education;
  3. Every child can make a successful transition out of alternative provision;
  4. Alternative provision becomes, and is recognised as, an integral part of the education system; and
  5. The system is designed to achieve high quality outcomes for children and value for money for the taxpayer.
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### **Our plan is to work with partners to:**

- **Lay strong foundations for reform**, by building the evidence base; reviewing exclusions practice; bringing key partners together; and supporting schools to establish systems to manage poor behaviour and support children with additional needs. In this way we aim to support those children at risk of exclusion; and those who return from alternative provision to mainstream or special school placements;
- **Develop and share effective practice within alternative provision and beyond**, by ensuring alternative provision settings can access school improvement resources; launching a dedicated Alternative Provision Innovation Fund; launching a new special and alternative provision free school wave; reviewing the education in alternative provision; and improving young people's transition out of alternative provision to education, employment and training at 16; and
- **Strengthen partnership arrangements for commissioning and delivering alternative provision**, by considering the use of unregistered alternative provision settings; developing a bespoke alternative provision performance framework; and clarifying the roles of schools, alternative providers and local authorities in delivering high quality alternative provision.

# Introduction

## What is alternative provision (AP)?

1. Alternative provision (AP) is for children of compulsory school age who do not attend mainstream or special schools and who would not otherwise receive suitable education, for any reason.
2. Local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for permanently excluded children and for other children who – because of illness or other reasons – would not receive suitable education, without such arrangements being made. Where a child has been subject to a fixed-period exclusion of more than five school days, schools must arrange AP.
3. Funding for AP comes from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to local authorities. The high needs funding allocation within the DSG is used to fund AP placements and also supports provision for 0-25 year olds with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. In 2016-17, £630m of local authorities' DSG allocation was spent on AP, including £83m on hospital education.
4. AP is provided through full or part-time, and short or longer-term placements. Placements can be delivered by AP academies, AP free schools and pupil referral units (PRUs). Other settings also provide AP, including independent schools, further education colleges, and other providers from the private and voluntary sectors. As at January 2017, 25,821 children were educated in AP free schools, AP academies and PRUs<sup>1,2</sup> and 22,212 children in other AP settings.

## Routes into AP

5. Children can require AP for a wide range of reasons, including:
  - behaviour which results in a permanent or fixed-period exclusion, or an off-site direction by a school;
  - health reasons – including physical or mental health needs; and
  - where a child is awaiting placement in a mainstream school.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2017>

<sup>2</sup> This Includes pupils who are sole or dual main registrations. Includes pupils in AP academies and free schools, boarding pupils and pupils registered in other providers and further education colleges. Also includes 10,152 dual subsidiary registered pupils.

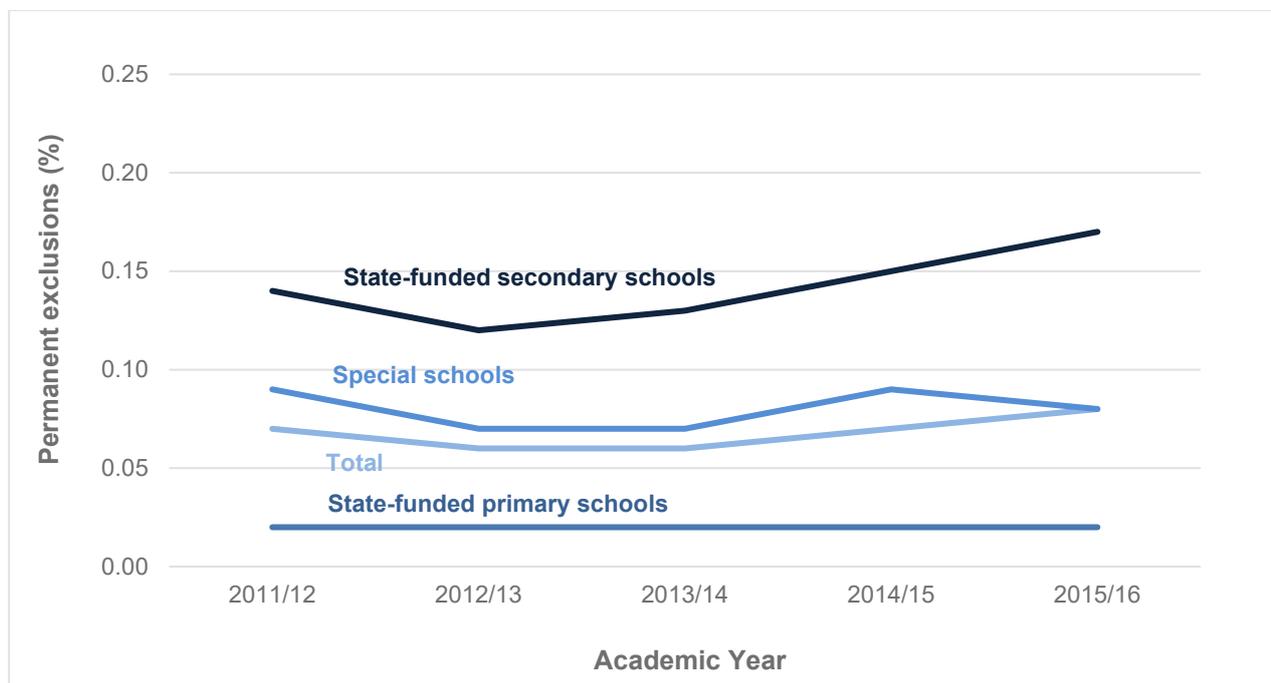
6. A child with these characteristics would not, however, necessarily need AP.

7. Depending on the reason a child requires AP, placements will be commissioned by local authorities or schools. It is up to the commissioner to determine the most appropriate AP for the child but they should take into account the views of the child, their parents and other professionals. The Department for Education (the Department) summarises the responsibility of the commissioner in statutory guidance<sup>3</sup>.

8. Although it is not the sole route, one of the main routes into AP is as a result of an exclusion. The latest statistics on exclusions show that, following a downward trend, the rates of permanent and fixed-period exclusions have risen since 2013/14. This was across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools, as shown in figures 1 and 2.

9. The most recent rate of permanent exclusion was 0.08% for state-funded primary, secondary and special schools. The number of permanent exclusions in 2015/16 was 6,685, of which 81% occurred in state-funded secondary schools. The rate of fixed-period exclusions was 4.29% for state-funded primary, secondary and special schools, and the number of fixed period exclusions was 339,360. 80% of all fixed-period exclusions occurred in state-funded secondary schools<sup>4</sup>.

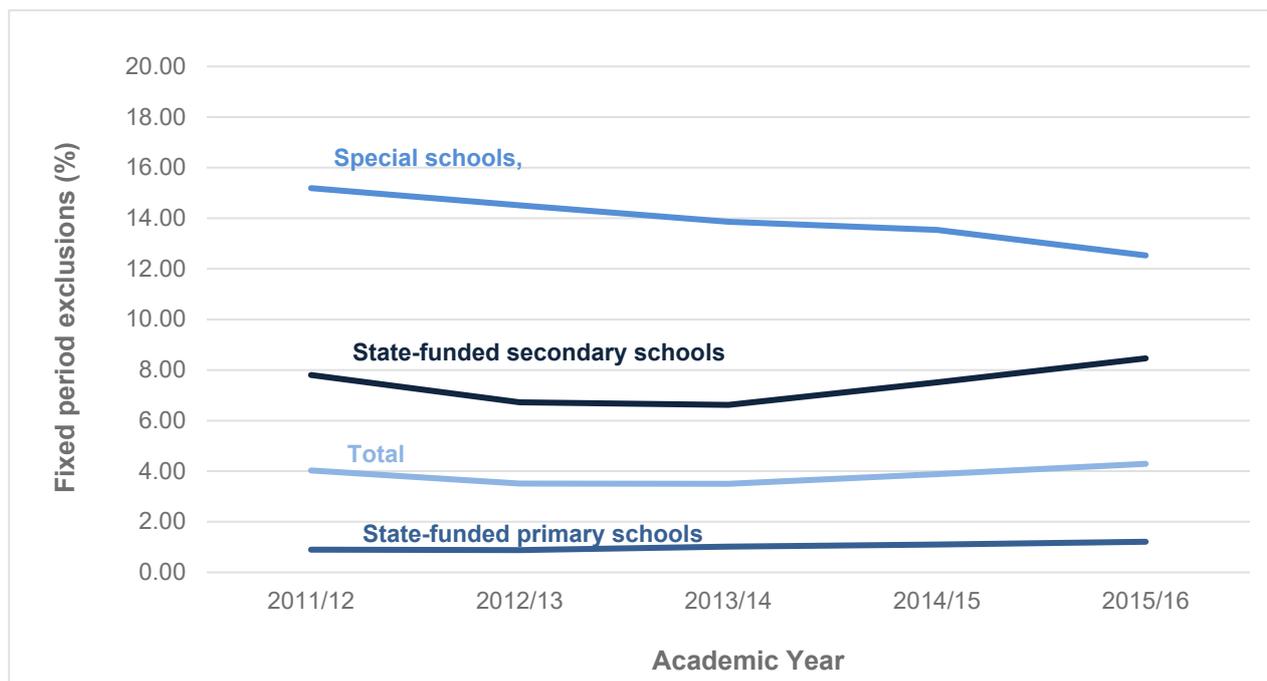
**Figure 1: Annual number and rate of permanent exclusions from 2011/12 to 2015/16**



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>

**Figure 2: Annual number and rate of fixed period exclusions from 2011/12 to 2015/16**



10. Other routes into AP include off-site direction from schools to improve a child’s behaviour; and referrals from the NHS, as a result of a child’s physical or mental health needs. In cases of health needs, local authorities are responsible for commissioning provision.

## Children in AP

11. Local authorities have a duty to provide AP for children of compulsory school age, and almost half (47%) of children in AP are aged 15 to 16 (year group 11).

12. Data shows that a significant number of children in AP are economically poor boys. Over 70% of children in PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools are boys, compared to 51% in state-funded primary and secondary schools.<sup>5</sup> More than 40% of children in PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools are eligible for free school meals, compared to 14% in mainstream state-funded schools. A large proportion of children in AP come from white British backgrounds. Children from black Caribbean; white and black Caribbean; white and black African gypsy/ Roma; Irish; and traveller of Irish heritage backgrounds are all over-represented in AP.

<sup>5</sup> Includes academies, free schools, city technology colleges, university technical colleges and studio schools.

13. Children who attend AP have a diverse range of needs. A high proportion of children in AP academies, AP free schools and PRUs have identified special educational needs compared to those in mainstream schools: 77.1% of children have a SEN or disability, and 10.4% have SEN statements or EHC plans. This compares to 14.4% and 2.8% in all schools respectively.<sup>6</sup> Most of these have a social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) need, which has implications for their behaviour. Children receiving 'SEN support' (i.e. those with SEN but not an EHC plan) are almost four times more likely to be permanently excluded compared to those without a SEN.<sup>7</sup>

## Outcomes for children in AP

14. Many children are supported to make rapid social, emotional and educational progress whilst in AP settings, but on average children who attend AP at Key Stage 4 do not achieve the same level of educational attainment as their peers in mainstream schools. National data shows that 4.5% of children who attended AP achieved 9-4 passes in English and mathematics at GCSE, compared to 65.1% in state-funded mainstream schools and 1.0% in state-funded special schools.

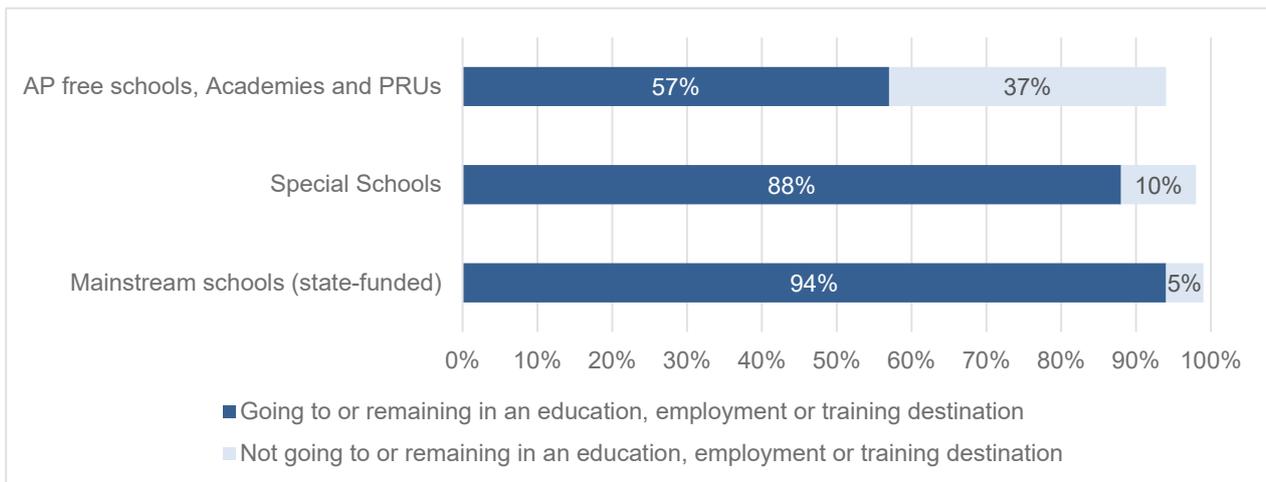
15. While there are many reasons why children who attend AP at Key Stage 4 may face challenges gaining GCSE grades, national data on outcomes for children leaving AP at 16 are also very poor. In 2015, young people who ended Key Stage 4 in AP made up 2% of all children at this stage but 14% of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) at 16. Comparison with special and mainstream settings shows that young people leaving AP do considerably worse: in 2015/16 more than one in three young people aged 16 leaving AP did not sustain education, employment or training, compared to approximately one in twenty young people leaving special and mainstream schools.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2017>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2015-to-2016>

**Figure 3: Percentage of the 2014/15 Key Stage 4 cohort going to, or remaining in, an education or employment destination in 2015/16**



16. Children who have been excluded are also disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. A study found that 63% of prisoners stated that they had been temporarily excluded while at school, and 42% were permanently excluded<sup>8</sup>. Of those young offenders sentenced in 2014, who were recorded as being 16 or 17 years old on their sentence date, 23% of those sentenced to less than 12 months in custody had been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentence date and 16% of those sentenced to 12 months or longer<sup>9</sup>.

## The quality of AP provision

17. Many AP settings are led by some of the most inspiring teachers and there are some examples of outstanding practice across the country. Due to the diversity of AP provision, placements and oversight arrangements, understanding AP performance is complex.

18. Any AP setting that is not maintained by a local authority or non-maintained special school and caters full-time for five or more children of compulsory school age; or one or more such child who is looked after, has an EHC plan or has a statement of SEN must, by law, be registered with the Department and inspected.

19. Ofsted inspects PRUs, AP academies and free schools under the Common Inspection framework and, nationally, these settings achieve high Ofsted ratings. As of 31 January 2018, 79% of PRUs, AP academies and free schools achieved a rating of 'outstanding' or 'good'. Only 12.5% were rated as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate', just above the proportion of mainstream and special schools (10.7%). Registered

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prisoners-childhood-and-family-backgrounds>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/understanding-the-educational-background-of-young-offenders-full-report>

independent schools offering AP are inspected against the same standards as mainstream independent schools.

20. AP settings that are not maintained by local authorities or non-maintained special schools, or fall below the requirements set out in paragraph 18, do not have to be registered with the Department. These settings are therefore not inspected by Ofsted in their own right. Local authorities and schools acting as the commissioner should assure themselves that the setting is registered where appropriate, and delivered by high quality staff with suitable training, experience and safeguarding checks. Commissioning schools are also assessed during all section 5 Ofsted inspections to determine how effectively they ensure that the AP they use is safe for children, and that those children are making progress and behaving and attending well.

21. Ofsted's study of schools' use of off-site AP shows that schools are increasingly making more considered use of AP<sup>10</sup>. The findings, published in 2016, showed that, increasingly, schools were paying closer attention to the quality of provision; the safety and suitability of placements for children; and the impact of AP on children's academic and personal development. Ofsted also raised concerns about schools' use of unregistered provision and identified weaknesses in schools' evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. These findings suggest significant improvements have been made in schools' use of AP since 2011, but that opportunities to improve further remain.

## The case for change

22. There is consensus that more can be achieved for children who attend AP.

23. Since 2010, a number of evaluations, studies and reviews have explored the characteristics of high performing AP providers and local AP arrangements and have identified opportunities to improve the way the education system works to promote them. A national exclusions trial was run from autumn 2011 to summer 2014 to test the benefits of schools having greater responsibility for meeting the needs of permanently excluded children and those at risk of permanent exclusion<sup>11</sup>. Charlie Taylor led an external review of how to improve the quality of AP<sup>12</sup>; Ofsted delivered a three-year study into schools' use of AP<sup>13</sup>; and the Department commissioned a literature review considering effective AP practice and post-16 transition<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, external interest in AP has

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-school-provision-findings-of-a-three-year-survey>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/331795/RR364\\_-\\_School\\_Exclusion\\_Trial\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/331795/RR364_-_School_Exclusion_Trial_Final_Report.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-alternative-provision>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-school-provision-findings-of-a-three-year-survey>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-effective-practice-and-post-16-transition>

remained high and the Education Select Committee launched an inquiry into AP in September 2017.

24. Findings from these initiatives and reviews identify opportunities to improve the way AP is delivered across the stages of a child's journey through AP settings. In particular:

- the efficacy of commissioning, planning and preparation for children's placements in AP;
- the importance of high expectations for, parental involvement in, and on-going oversight of children's development and progress;
- the need for a high-quality education delivered by well-trained staff; and
- effective planning and support to children as they transition out of AP.

25. The reviews also identify a need for systemic improvements to local AP systems, including:

- building the skills and incentives for mainstream and special schools to develop effective strategies and interventions to address poor behaviour, at all levels, to prevent escalation to exclusion;
- developing a shared understanding of the purpose and expectations of AP, at a local level;
- strengthening accountability and quality assurance arrangements for commissioners to deliver better outcomes for children in AP;
- tackling teacher recruitment and development challenges in AP settings;
- promoting greater use and sharing of data on AP performance to inform commissioning decisions; and
- promoting stronger information sharing between local authorities and education settings about children's needs at strategic and individual placement levels, to ensure decisions about commissioning and placement transitions are as effective as possible.

26. Charlie Taylor's review of AP found that the most effective AP arrangements were developed when local authorities and groups of schools took ownership and shaped local AP as a resource to support them to help their most challenging children. In practice, however, the AP sector often finds itself on the periphery of the education system. This limits its ability to learn from and influence other school settings and to improve outcomes for the children for which it is responsible.

27. We have increased overall funding allocations to local authorities for high needs, including AP, by £130 million in 2017-18 and are providing a further £142 million in 2018-19. We need to ensure that the available funding delivers the best outcomes for children at a cost that is affordable, so we can demonstrate value for money in this aspect of the education system.

## Our vision for reform

28. The Government strongly believes that every child deserves an education that enables them to fulfil their potential, whatever their background, needs or location in the country. AP plays a critical role in making this happen. It provides support to children at challenging moments in their lives and each placement has the potential to transform a child's life chances.

29. This vision for reform seeks to build on the inspirational work of teachers in schools and AP settings across the country. It seeks to build an evidence base about how to improve outcomes for children and to spread this consistently across the school system. As set out in the case for change section, previous reviews have found that the most effective AP arrangements are where local partners own and shape AP, treating it as an integral part of the local education system. This is a core objective for our reforms.

## Our objectives for reforming AP

30. In delivering our reforms, the Government wants to ensure:

- **the right children are placed in AP:** We want to support mainstream and special schools to create the school culture and behaviour management systems that support children to remain in or re-integrate into their schools, where that is in the best interests of the child and compatible with the interests of other children at that school. We need commissioners who place children in AP for behavioural, health or other reasons to plan for how the placement will meet the child's needs and support their transition into a mainstream or special school, another medical placement or onto meaningful employment, education or training at 16. Wherever possible, this planning and decision-making should involve parents and children.
- **children have good experiences of, and receive high quality education in, AP:** AP should not simply be viewed as a provider of last resort. AP settings should enable children to make rapid personal, social, and educational progress and go on to attain qualifications or re-integrate back into mainstream or special schools. AP providers should provide an ambitious education that meets children's needs and prepares them for success in the next phase of their education.
- **children achieve meaningful outcomes after leaving AP:** The success of AP settings can be measured by how well prepared children are for the next stage of their lives. Schools, local authorities, AP settings, referring NHS teams, post-16 providers and employers should work together to ensure the routes out of AP are well-developed, so that children who leave AP settings can fulfil their potential as they grow up.

- **AP is recognised as an integral part of the education system:** The role of AP as an integral part of the education system should be respected and its performance should be developed through partnerships across the education system. AP should be an attractive place for teachers to train, work and develop. There must be sufficient high quality and specialist provision to meet the needs of compulsory school-age children, for as long as they need it.
- **the system is designed to achieve high quality outcomes for children and value for money for the tax payer:** AP should be delivered on the basis of a robust evidence base about how commissioning, accountability and inspection arrangements support the delivery of better, long-term outcomes for children and value for money for the taxpayer.

## Our approach to reform

31. We have set ourselves an ambitious vision and challenging objectives to reform AP. This document sets out how we will achieve them, working closely with the whole education system, including schools, local authorities, and AP and post 16 providers.

32. We have designed the reform programme in three key phases, so that plans can be delivered, sustainably, together with stakeholders. We will:

- **lay strong foundations for reform**, by building the evidence base; reviewing exclusions practice; bringing key partners together; and supporting schools to support children with additional needs and establish systems to manage poor behaviour, from low level disruption to more challenging behaviour. In this way we aim to support those children at risk of exclusion; and those who return from AP to mainstream or special school placements.
- **develop and share effective practice within alternative provision and beyond**, by ensuring AP settings can access school improvement resources; launching a dedicated Alternative Provision Innovation Fund; launching a new special and AP free school wave; reviewing the education in AP; and improving young people's transition out of AP to education, training and employment at 16.
- **strengthen partnership arrangements for commissioning and delivering alternative provision**, by considering the use of unregistered AP settings; developing a bespoke AP performance framework; and clarifying the roles of schools, alternative providers and local authorities in delivering high quality AP.

33. We have already made progress, laying the foundations for reform. We are now seeking to develop and share effective practice across and beyond the AP sector and will deliver longer-term changes to the accountability framework for AP, over the coming years.

# Building a strong foundation for reform

34. Successful reform of AP must work for a range of children and AP providers and in the context of a variety of local AP commissioning arrangements. It must also be built on a strong evidence base and the right conditions in schools to enable children to remain in, or reintegrate into, mainstream or special placements, where this is in their best interests and compatible with the interests of all children in the schools.

35. That is why the first phase of our reform programme is focusing on engaging partners in developing and designing our reforms; building the evidence base about how the system is working now and how to improve outcomes for children in AP; and working with special and mainstream schools to ensure they can support children to remain and reintegrate into their schools, where it is appropriate for them to do so. This chapter sets out our plans for this phase in more detail.

## Supporting schools to deliver whole school approaches to manage behaviour

36. Good behaviour across all schools is key to ensuring that all children are able to achieve their full potential. Poor behaviour is a leading reason for a child to be moved into AP, either through exclusion or through off-site direction to AP. From tackling low-level disruption to dealing with more challenging incidents, effective schools have strategies and interventions to systematically address misbehaviour. Tackling poor behaviour allows teachers to teach and children to learn. This approach, backed up by a strong, whole-school culture, can help reduce incidents of poor behaviour that result in exclusion. We have made progress in giving schools the tools to manage poor behaviour within their school, including allowing schools to hold same-day detentions, but there is more that can be done to help schools to adopt effective whole-school approaches.

37. Following the publication of Tom Bennett's Review of Behaviour Management in Schools in March 2017<sup>15</sup>, we have been implementing his recommendations and promoting the effective practice shared in his report. Through the first round of the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (TLIF), we funded a project focused on teaching and leadership capability to implement effective behaviour management strategies. Round two of TLIF welcomes projects seeking to develop consistent whole-school cultures; opportunities to observe and develop practical skills; and opportunities to

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools>

develop centralised expertise and systems for extreme behaviour, for example centralised detention systems.

38. The new National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) (content, assessment framework and qualification) have been delivered since the beginning of the 2017/18 academic year. The reformed NPQs include provision for aspirant and serving head teachers, as well as middle leaders, senior leaders and executive leaders to develop the range of core knowledge, skills, and approaches to address behavioural issues.

39. Tom Bennett's review made a recommendation to Government to provide greater guidance to schools on how to manage challenging behaviour and children with specific needs. We are updating the mental health and behaviour guidance to schools, and will be working with an external steering group to develop this guidance in 2018.

## **Enabling schools to support children with additional needs**

40. Children with special educational needs, looked after children and children in need can face unequal chances in their lives and are disproportionately represented among those attending AP. There is clear evidence that schools can, and do, play a vital role in supporting these children to engage in education, including by identifying special educational needs and mental health needs at an early stage and by working jointly with partner agencies in health and children's social care.

41. The recently published Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper<sup>16</sup> sets out an ambitious set of proposals to fill the gap in support for children and young people's mental health, backed by £300m of funding. It set out plans to incentivise schools to identify and train a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health; introduce new Mental Health Support Teams, providing earlier access to a wider range of support and treatments; and pilot a new four-week waiting time for NHS children and young people's mental health services. The Government will test, through the trailblazers, how mainstream, special and AP settings can enhance provision for the most vulnerable children.

42. As announced in March 2018, the Department is taking forward the manifesto commitment to review the outcomes of, and support for, Children in Need. This is a significant opportunity to consider how we can improve these vulnerable children's outcomes and enable them to reach their potential.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper>

## Reviewing exclusions practice

43. In considering end-to-end reform of AP, it is important that we consider the current practice of exclusion and how schools seek to avoid excluding children, including the role of AP settings in supporting schools to manage children's behaviour.

44. Head teachers can exclude children for a fixed term, or permanently, and the Government supports head teachers' use of exclusion, where that is appropriate. It is equally important that the obligations on schools are clear and well understood. The law on exclusions is clear that when excluding a child, schools must:

- be reasonable and fair, and not discriminate against a child because of a protected characteristic; and
- have regard to our statutory guidance, including considering what extra support might be needed to identify and address the needs of children from groups with disproportionately high rates of exclusion.

45. Schools should, as far as possible, avoid permanently excluding children who have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or who are looked after.

46. In 2015/16, 0.08% of children were permanently excluded from state funded schools in England but the rates for some children are much higher. The Ethnicity Facts and Figures website<sup>17</sup>, which collates data on how ethnic groups interact with public services, highlighted that pupils from some ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately likely to be excluded from school. Black Caribbean pupils, for example, were permanently excluded at three times the rate of White British pupils. White Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma pupils had, by far, the highest rates of both fixed period and permanent exclusions. As well those ethnic groups highlighted on the Ethnicity Facts and Figures website, other pupil groups also emerge in the national data as more likely to be excluded from school. For example, this includes pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or have been eligible for free school meals in the last six years, those with special educational needs and disabilities, looked after children and children in need.

47. The Government is launching an externally-led review of school exclusion practice to explore and evaluate how schools use exclusion and what drives the differing rates of exclusions for children with some characteristics. The Government has appointed Edward Timpson, CBE to lead the review which will report by the end of the year. Alongside the publication of this document, the Department is opening the review with a call for evidence, published alongside the scope of the review.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/>

## **Building the evidence base on AP**

48. There is limited evidence on how local authorities, schools and AP providers can work together effectively to deliver better outcomes for children in AP and for children at risk of exclusion. Greater understanding about these issues is essential for delivering an effective reform programme. We have, therefore, launched an extensive qualitative and quantitative research programme into AP practices across England.

49. Our research focuses on three areas:

- how mainstream and special schools commission AP and support children at risk of exclusion;
- AP providers', children's and parents' experiences of AP settings, from the assessment of a child's need to their transition back into a mainstream or special placement or education, employment or training placement post-16; and
- local need for AP; the availability of AP placements; and the range and effectiveness of local AP commissioning arrangements.

50. We have begun to engage every local authority in England, 300 schools, 250 AP providers, as well as children and their parents in this research programme. We have developed our research programme on this scale to ensure we understand the complexity of children's needs; the variety of AP providers; and the range of requirements for effective local AP commissioning and delivery arrangements across the country.

51. We are planning to publish final reports in autumn 2018 and will use the findings to inform future work strands on AP reform.

## **Ensuring reform of AP enables all children to succeed**

52. It is critical that any reform programme for AP meets the diverse needs of children within AP settings, including those with medical health needs, and enables a range of AP providers. It is also essential to recognise that successful AP reform relies upon joined-up working between organisations and individuals who commission, quality assure, provide and inspect AP settings.

53. We are, therefore, planning to establish a stakeholder reference group. This will bring together leaders with a broad range of experiences of working in, or with, AP settings, who can advise on, and inform the design and delivery of, the reforms as we progress them. Over time, we hope this group can build further a network of people with expertise in AP, to strengthen the voice of the sector and visibility of children who attend AP, at a national level.

## **Developing and sharing effective practice within and beyond AP**

54. There are many remarkable schools and AP settings where committed staff work together to ensure high-quality outcomes for the children in their settings. We want to build on the work of these individuals and institutions and recognise that high-quality AP relies upon well-supported teachers.

55. This chapter sets out how we will invest in the development of teachers and leaders in AP; invest in the development and spread of effective practice; and ensure the school improvement system is accessible to AP settings.

56. We will use the findings from our research to develop proposals for bringing greater consistency to the quality of the education in AP, to improve outcomes for children, consulting the sector in due course.

## **Opening an AP strand of the Teaching Innovation and Leadership Fund**

57. Developing and supporting teachers and leaders is fundamental to driving up standards in AP and, in turn, improving outcomes for children. The quality of teachers is the most important school-level factor in determining child outcomes. We have already changed the Initial Teaching Training requirements to allow AP academies, free schools and PRUs to train new teachers and we now want to ensure that staff within AP providers can access other opportunities for continuous professional development.

58. That is why we opened a designated AP strand as part of the second round of the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (TLIF), which will support high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders in the areas and schools in England that need it most. TLIF opened for bids on 31 January 2018 and closed on 1 March 2018. The AP strand will support successful projects that seek to develop excellence within the AP workforce, develop future leaders and build links with mainstream schools. Bids were welcomed from alternative and other providers and were not restricted to priority schools or priority areas.

## **Ensuring the Strategic School Improvement Fund is accessible to AP settings**

59. The Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) is a grant fund which aims to support a broad range of school improvement activities, through targeting resources at the schools that most need to improve their performance and child attainment. It aims to help them use their resources more effectively and to deliver more good school places. Teaching schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities are all eligible to apply.

60. We have built flexibility into the eligibility criteria that AP settings have to meet for the third round of the Strategic School Improvement Fund, which opened for bids on 31 January 2018 and closes on 20 April 2018. We hope this flexibility will enable more AP providers to access the SSIF.

## **Launching a dedicated AP Innovation Fund**

61. The Department has launched an Innovation Fund of £4 million focused on developing effective practice for improving outcomes for children who attend AP. The Fund will run from 2018 until 2020.

62. The Fund will be focused on projects that seek to:

- support children to make good academic progress in AP and successful transitions from AP to education, training and employment at age 16 and beyond;
- support children to reintegrate into suitable mainstream or special placements, where this is in the best interests of the child and compatible with the interests of other children at that school; and
- enable better educational outcomes for children in AP by increasing parental or carer engagement.

63. It is our ambition that the AP Innovation Fund will deepen the evidence base on how to improve outcomes for children in AP. We will bring participants together, regularly, to share their emerging findings and effective practice, thus helping to create a network of innovation across AP provision.

64. We are looking for projects that are focused on achieving the outcomes we want, will have an impact on the wider AP sector and can be sustained beyond investment from the Fund. All projects will need to have clear, achievable plans for delivery and offer value for money. Further details on the application process, requirements and assessment criteria will be made available in due course.

## **Opening a special and AP free school wave**

65. Since 2010 we have opened 39 AP free schools across the country, with another 19 in the pipeline, which has enabled new and existing providers to develop new AP models. We know that new AP free schools work effectively when they are designed to be part of the local network of schools, and to create a new supply of high quality places in areas of need. We will build on the existing free schools programme and this learning of what is effective for AP free schools, by launching a joint special and AP free school wave in the summer of 2018.

66. Our AP research programme has already started to build our understanding of local need, availability and AP commissioning and provider arrangements and we will use

the findings of this research will inform the design and scale of the next wave. It will also be informed by linked programmes of work, including the wider AP reform programme set out in this roadmap, and the Exclusions Review, which is considering what drives differing exclusion rates for certain pupil groups and areas of the country. Our expectation is that new AP free schools would open from 2020 onwards and further details will be provided, in due course, about the application process and selection criteria.

## Considering the role of Teaching Schools in improving AP

67. Teaching schools have an important role to play in delivering school improvement. They are centres of excellence and take a focused role in co-ordinating and providing school-led initial teacher training; providing high-quality school-to-school support to spread excellent practice; and providing evidence-based professional and leadership development for teachers and leaders across their network.

68. AP is already in scope of the teaching schools framework and, as at November 2017, there were four PRUs and three AP academies operating as teaching schools. There could be further opportunities to develop the role of teaching schools in AP, so we will work with the Teaching Schools Council and existing AP teaching schools to better understand the role that AP and mainstream teaching schools could have in improving AP quality.

## Reviewing the education in AP settings

69. Statutory guidance advises that AP enables children to study ‘appropriate accreditation and qualifications’ and receive an education that is ‘on a par with mainstream’. This requirement is purposely flexible to allow AP providers to develop creative ways to meet the needs of children, many of whom have struggled to engage with traditional education provision. In practice, however, this freedom can result in expectations being set too low for children’s academic development in some AP settings.

70. Ofsted’s three-year study of schools’ use of off-site AP as a mechanism to prevent exclusions or re-engage pupils in education found that children can receive a narrow education and weak curriculum when they are in AP<sup>18</sup>. National data shows that children in AP have lower attendance rates than children in other settings<sup>19</sup> and Ofsted’s study found that sometimes they can miss out on studying English and mathematics and often find it difficult to catch up afterwards.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-school-provision-findings-of-a-three-year-survey>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2016-and-spring-2017>

71. Ofsted's study also considered the role that mainstream schools play in ensuring that children in AP access an effective alternative education. Ofsted found that too many schools did not know how to set expectations for children's progress while they were in AP. As a result, some children do not achieve in line with their abilities or gain the qualifications they should. The same Ofsted study also considered the preparedness for pathways out of AP, for children at Key Stage 4. The findings show that a large majority of schools visited (85%) had clearly planned pathways between AP and continuing study at school, college, an apprenticeship or employment. Where schools discussed careers at an early stage with children, they valued the support and found that AP helped them make better-informed decisions about their future. It is positive that many settings included in this study are giving active consideration to effective pathways, but we are aware that there is scope for improvement in overall outcomes.

72. We plan to review our expectations for the educational standard in AP settings. Our research programme will map what is currently commissioned and provided across AP settings, including settings where children are referred for behaviour, medical and other reasons. It will also explore providers', children's and parents' experiences of receiving support and education in AP settings and their views about what is most effective in supporting children to engage in education, achieve the qualifications they need and make successful transitions out of AP and into mainstream or special school placements or education, employment and training post 16.

## Support to young people leaving AP at 16

73. Almost half of all children attending AP are in Key Stage 4 and nearly one in three does not sustain education, employment or training when they leave. We need to find better ways to support young people to learn the skills they need for a fulfilling adult life. That means enabling them to be ready for employment, independent living, good health and community engagement. This will enable young people leaving AP to make positive, informed choices about post-16 study and future employment, centred on their own strengths, aspirations and interests. A resource suggesting practical activities that teachers can use to support children and young people to prepare for adult life can be found [here](#).

74. It is vital that AP providers start preparing children for employment as early as possible, and from age 14 at the latest. This includes:

- Aspirational and well-informed careers guidance. *The Careers Strategy*<sup>20</sup> sets out a vision for high-quality careers guidance, which can unlock potential and

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<sup>20</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664319/Careers\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664319/Careers_strategy.pdf)

transform outcomes. This can be supported by vocational profiling, which records individual's skill sets, personality, capabilities, experience and employment goals.

- Contact with employers, including work experience, to bring the world of work to life (several contacts with different employers will be more powerful than a single encounter).
- A curriculum which supports their planned progression into post-16 education and beyond, into work.
- Support in developing "soft skills" that employers value, such as behaviours for work and people skills, as well as English and maths.
- Active support in making a successful transition into post-16 education or training, in partnership with post-16 providers (e.g. through taster sessions in FE, summer school programmes, visits).

75. AP providers should have a good understanding of the post-16 options to which young people leaving AP can progress. These include academic, technical or vocational study programmes at different levels of study and work-based pathways such as apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships. There is also a wide range of different post-16 providers including general further education colleges and work-based training providers.

76. It is important that young people moving from AP are supported in their post-16 setting. Support is already in place to help post-16 students with additional needs. For example:

- Most schools and colleges have a duty under the Children and Families Act 2014 to use their best endeavours to meet the special educational needs of their students (up to age 19, or to 25 with an EHC plan).
- Post-16 providers receive additional funding to help students who are disadvantaged so they can give them the support they need.
- Financial support is available to eligible 16-19 year olds (or up to age 25 with an EHC plan) to help with costs of post-16 education such as course equipment, child care or travel.
- Additional support is available for some apprentices, including 16-18 year olds, apprentices from disadvantaged areas, care leavers and those with EHC plans;
- Access to Work funding is also available to support apprentices in the workplace who are disabled or have a physical or mental health condition.
- There is a legal duty on local authorities to track the educational activity of young people aged 16 and 17 to identify and support those who are struggling to participate.

77. We are committed to raising the proportion of young people leaving AP to engage in education, employment and training. We have already published findings from a literature review on how to support young people leaving AP to make successful

transitions<sup>21</sup>. We have commissioned further primary research to explore children's, schools', AP and post-16 providers' recent experiences of this transition and what they consider to be the most effective approaches. We are also launching a dedicated strand of the AP Innovation Fund, which will invite people to design and test new approaches to improve outcomes for young people leaving AP at age 16. We will also engage with AP and post-16 providers to identify and share new and better ways of supporting young people in AP to make the transition into post-16 settings and into adult life.

## **Ensuring effective practice from across the education system and beyond reaches AP settings**

78. AP providers often find themselves on the periphery of local education systems and effective practice is not always shared between parts of the schools system or with other services. In taking forward our reform of AP, we will work closely with the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Youth Justice Board to ensure AP is able to incorporate effective practices from other parts of public services and access funding for new initiatives. We will also ensure new education reforms benefit children in AP.

79. For example, we will ensure that children in AP settings benefit equally from the introduction of relationships education in primary schools, relationships and sex education in secondary schools and personal, social, health and economic education. We will also ensure children in AP can benefit from the same opportunities as mainstream and special schools, such as more chances to visit natural spaces as part of the Government's 25-year environment plan and the latest prevention and early intervention initiatives on tackling issues around drugs and serious violence.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-effective-practice-and-post-16-transition>

# Strengthening partnership arrangements for commissioning and delivering AP

80. Some of the most effective local AP arrangements develop where local authorities and schools come together to strategically shape how AP services are delivered; and to quality assure placements and settings, to ensure children achieve their potential. Some local partnerships are already working in this way. Delivering consistently high-quality AP commissioning and delivery arrangements across England will require partners to deliver changes at a system level.

81. This chapter sets out how we will work collaboratively with partners to develop policy proposals that will deliver this system change, building on the evidence base and effective practice we develop in the first two phases of our reform programme.

## Considering the use of unregistered settings

82. We know that local authorities, schools and AP providers commission unregistered AP settings for a variety of reasons, including to equip children with vocational skills working with field specialists or to offer work placements. This can be a positive choice for a child or young person where an unregistered setting can be used to re-engage children in their education, perhaps where traditional settings have not been successful. In all cases the local authority or school acting as the commissioner should assure themselves that the setting is registered where appropriate and provision is delivered by high quality staff with suitable training, experience and safeguarding checks.

83. The practice of using unregistered provision could pose risks, particularly when used for the most vulnerable children in AP. The Education Select Committee's Inquiry into AP welcomed evidence covering the issue of regulation of independent providers, and Ofsted has raised concerns about insufficient oversight and quality assurance in this part of the system.

84. It is vital that all children receive a high-quality education in a safe environment that is fit for learning. The Government will look closely at the evidence gathered and produced by the Education Select Committee on the use of unregistered AP settings and will consider whether any action is needed in this area.

## Developing a bespoke performance framework for the AP sector

85. Beyond Ofsted judgements, there is no systematic way of identifying and celebrating effective practice in AP. In some local areas, there is no shared understanding of the purpose of AP and only low expectations for children's attendance, educational attainment and transition to education, employment and training post-16.

High expectations and mechanisms that identify and share effective practice are critical to improving commissioning arrangements and the development of the AP sector. AP providers consistently report a desire to compare, develop and share effective practice and so we are planning to test the feasibility of a bespoke performance framework for AP.

86. Our intention is to work collaboratively with Ofsted and the full range of AP commissioning and provider groups, including local authorities, further education colleges, schools, AP free schools, AP academies, PRUs, independent, medical and other AP providers, on the development of this framework. We will incorporate findings from our research programme and build on the evidence we develop through the AP Innovation Fund, which will seek to use consistent outcomes measures across projects where relevant. Our plan is to develop a range of options for how this framework could be used in practice and to test these with partners across the education sector before considering how to introduce them nationally.

## Considering commissioning arrangements for AP

87. Charlie Taylor's review of AP emphasised the importance of schools and local authorities taking ownership of commissioning high-quality AP placements and becoming more responsible for the associated budgets. He noted that areas with high performing AP systems have a good understanding of local AP needs; routine processes for planning placements and reviewing provider performance; good arrangements with other local services; and rigour at individual placement levels, to ensure every child receives an education that meets their needs and enables them to progress in line with their potential.

88. The Government set out plans to transfer accountability for AP commissioning and the education of pupils in AP from local authorities to mainstream schools in the *Educational Excellence Everywhere* White Paper, published in 2016<sup>22</sup>. We remain committed to ensuring that schools play their part and work in collaboration with AP providers and local authorities to take more responsibility for these areas.

89. We recognise that there is a variety of AP commissioning models across different geographies, local school systems and education stages and that any changes to responsibilities made by the Department must be made carefully and supported by evidence of what is most effective in achieving outcomes for children and value for money. Some local areas have already developed strong partnership arrangements which seek to share responsibilities across schools for strategic AP commissioning and accountability for individual placement decisions. Some areas have also designed

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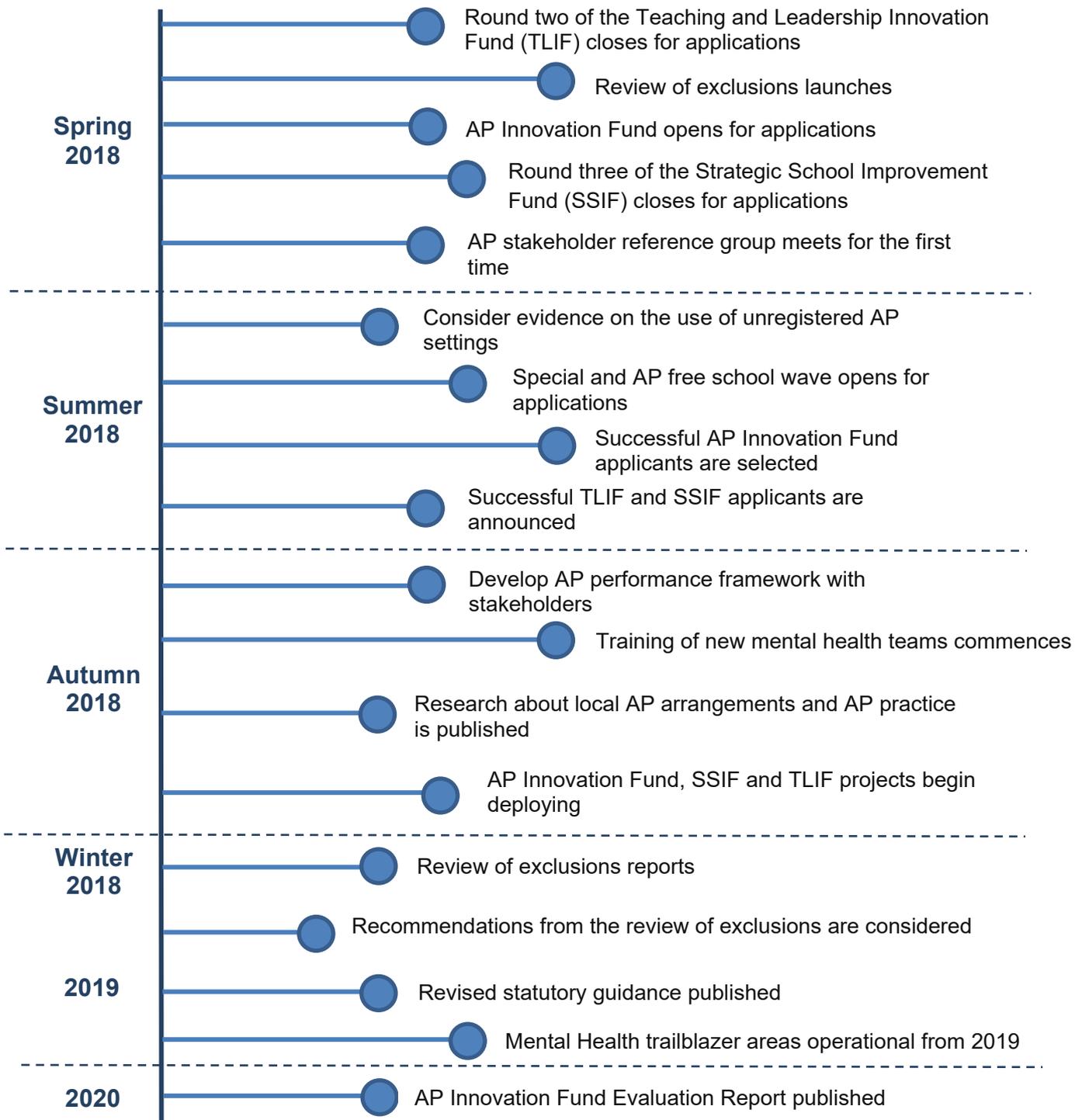
<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-excellence-everywhere>

strategic AP pathways and developed agreements to incentivise schools to use permanent exclusions as a last resort.

90. We are building a better understanding of these models and their effectiveness alongside schools' AP commissioning and exclusions practices through our research programme and the exclusions review. Once we have reported the findings from these initiatives, the Department will clarify its expectations for the roles and responsibilities of local authorities, schools and AP providers in commissioning and delivering child outcomes. We expect to do this through statutory guidance, commissioning and inspection arrangements and legislation as required. In the meantime, we will continue to support schools, local authorities and AP providers to strengthen local partnerships to deliver better outcomes for children and value for money across the AP system.

# Timeline for AP reform

This timeline outlines some of the key milestones for AP reform. It is indicative and further milestones will be developed and shared in due course.





Department  
for Education

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