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Understanding the impact of school choices for improving attendance and reducing exclusions: Internal provision impact evaluation

Evaluation report

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Kerry Martin, Andrew Smith, Ruth Staunton,
Sarah Tang, Geeta Gambhir, Jen Graham,
Emma Simpson, Ben Styles, and Helen Poet

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This project is part of a joint funding round with the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). The YEF and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) are partnering to find, fund, and evaluate programmes and practices in England and Wales that could keep children safe from involvement in violence and/or improve academic attainment, by increasing school presence.

The YEF and the EEF have independently followed their internal review process for the projects they manage in this joint funding partnership.



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For more information about the EEF or this report please contact:

- 📍 The Education Endowment Foundation
5th Floor, Millbank Tower,
21–24 Millbank,
London,
SW1P 4QP
- ☎ 0207 802 1653
- ✉ info@eefoundation.org.uk
- 🌐 www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk





About the Youth Endowment Fund


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Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we will fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We will build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activity.

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For more information about the YEF or this report please contact:

 Youth Endowment Fund
C/O Impetus,
10 Queen Street Place,
London,
EC4R 1AG

 hello@youthendowmentfund.org.uk

 www.youthendowmentfund.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1185413

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About the evaluator

This project was independently conducted by a research team from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and The Difference.

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The Difference is an education charity that tackles the social justice issue of school exclusions. The work of The Difference centres on building expertise in whole-school inclusion through training people, sharing practice, and influencing policy www.the-difference.com.

Contact details:

Helen Poet, Research Director
National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)
The Mere,
Upton Park,
Slough,
SL1 2DQ

Email: enquiries@nfer.ac.uk

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This work contains statistical data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which is Crown Copyright. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets, which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

Glossary of key terms

The glossary of key terms defines general, sector-specific and study-specific terminology, clarifying how key terms are used in this report to support the interpretation of the findings. Some of the terminology used in this report has been revised from the study plan (Smith, Staunton, and Martin, 2025) to improve clarity and reflect insights from sector feedback and the analysis process. Where terms have changed this is explained in relevant sections and noted in the glossary.

Sector-specific key terms	
Internal provision	The range of approaches used within mainstream schools to support students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. This can include separate internal provision, where students receive support in a separate place in the school but outside their regular classroom for all/most of their taught timetable and provision where students remain with their class and have additional support (e.g. mentoring, tutoring, or well-being support that may take place outside the classroom). Originally labelled in the study plan as 'internal alternative provision (AP)', this term has been revised as definitions of internal AP vary across government guidance, research and individual interpretation and are used inconsistently. The broader term 'internal provision' is used throughout this report to encompass the widest range of school support for pupils at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion.
Alternative provision	Education arranged and funded by local authorities for students who, because of exclusion, illness, or other reasons are not receiving a suitable education and included Pupil Referral Units, alternative provision academies, and alternative provision free schools.
Off-site direction	When a governing board of a maintained school requires a student to attend another education setting temporarily to improve their behaviour Academies can arrange off-site provision for such purposes under their general powers.
Unexplained school exits	Students who moved between schools or who left their school to an unknown destination without a clear recorded reason. Not included in this group are those that have been permanently excluded and those with family-driven moves (i.e. students that have moved to a different geographic area, those with parents/carers in military service, and students with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller of Irish Heritage ethnicity) (Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019).
Universal support	School support potentially available to all students but typically provided to students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion as part of early intervention.
Targeted support	School support for specific young people considered to be 'at risk' of persistent absence and/or exclusion.
Personalised/tailored support	School support that is adapted to meet the individual needs of a young person at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion.
Study-specific key terms	
Students 'at risk'	Young people considered by schools involved in the study as having an increased likelihood of being persistently absent and/or of being suspended or permanently excluded from school.
'Defined internal provision'	A term created to describe schools that reported in the scoping phase survey that they had some form of internal provision for students at risk of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or persistent absence (subsequently classified into the 'embedded' and 'parallel' support groups).
'Embedded' support	A term derived from statistical methods used in this study to describe a group of schools, which tended to have more 'tailored' support (i.e. to meet individual student needs) as part of their internal provision, where students remained with their mainstream class for some or all of the time while receiving additional support. This provision was typically provided to a larger number of students and for longer periods.
'Parallel' support	A term derived from statistical methods used in this study to describe a group of schools, which tended to provide more 'standardised' support as part of their internal provision (i.e. where the curriculum, teaching, and support was not adapted to meet individual student needs), usually taking place outside of mainstream classrooms, to fewer students and for shorter periods.
'Undefined provision'	A term created to describe schools that reported in the scoping phase survey that they had no specific provision for students at risk of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or persistent absence, or who were unsure if any existed at their school. Originally labelled in the study plan as schools with 'no internal AP'. However, the implementation and process evaluation (IPE) indicated that there was a much more complex picture in these schools that was harder for schools (and the research team) to define and classify. As these schools were providing some form of support, rather than no support at all, this group is referred to as having 'undefined provision' throughout this report.
IPE schools	Schools participating in the IPE phase of the study.

Case study schools	Schools participating in the IPE phase, which were selected for detailed exploration of their internal provision approaches through school visits and face-to-face interviews.
Deep-dive interviews	Online interviews conducted with senior leaders with responsibility for attendance and behaviour from schools participating in the IPE phase to gain a detailed understanding of the schools' model of internal provision.
Impact evaluation key term	
Not statistically significant	Where findings are not statistically significant it means that the quantitative evidence does not meet the threshold set by the evaluator to conclude that the true impact was non-zero. In other words, the analysis could not determine whether there was a differential impact between the types of provision on the outcome relevant to the specific research question.

Executive summary

The project

Being suspended, excluded, or frequently absent from school increases the likelihood of negative outcomes for young people. Secondary schools vary widely in how they support these pupils, but many approaches lack strong evidence of what works. This study explored the choices made by secondary schools in England to support students ‘at risk’ of persistent absence and/or exclusion through their own in-school provision (‘internal provision’ – see the glossary for definitions of key terms used throughout the report). This project is part of a joint funding round with the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) to evaluate practices in England and Wales that could keep children safe from involvement in violence and/or improve academic attainment, by reducing absenteeism.

An initial scoping phase (October 2022 to March 2024) was conducted to assess the viability of designing an impact evaluation. Survey data from 478 schools were analysed, and two main types of internal provision were identified, labelled ‘parallel’ and ‘embedded’ support. Schools in the ‘embedded’ support group more often delivered ‘tailored’ support, to a larger number of students over longer periods while ‘at-risk’ students typically remained in their ‘mainstream’ classes. On the other hand, schools in the ‘parallel’ support group tended to provide more ‘standardised’ provision, usually outside of mainstream classrooms, to fewer students and for shorter periods. A third group of schools with ‘undefined provision’ was also identified, including schools that reported in the survey to have no specific provision for students ‘at risk’ of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or persistent absence, or who were unsure if any existed at their school.

The scoping phase confirmed that an impact evaluation was viable. The evaluation phase that followed (March 2024 to September 2025) included schools across the different groups above and included an impact evaluation and an implementation and process evaluation (IPE). The impact evaluation examined whether the internal provision approach affected the probability of absence, suspension, exclusion, and unexplained school exits among ‘at-risk’ secondary students (and, more broadly, all secondary students—the ‘at-risk’ group being a subset of the latter). The analysis compared the ‘embedded’ support (66 schools) with the ‘parallel’ support (184 schools) groups; and the ‘defined internal provision’ (‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’) group (184 schools) with the ‘undefined provision’ group (180 schools). The IPE focused on understanding any diversity between schools within the same group, as well as describing their distinguishing features.

Table 1: Key conclusions

Key conclusions

1. The research is unable to draw firm conclusions about the relative impact of ‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ approaches to internal provision on the probability of students’ suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit. This was the case for both the ‘at-risk’ subgroup and all secondary students analysed. In practice, the two approaches were found to vary and overlap more than expected, meaning the two groups were not sufficiently distinct to allow a meaningful comparison.
2. Similarly, the research was unable to draw firm conclusions about the relative impact of any ‘defined internal provision’ (‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ support) versus ‘undefined provision’. This was the case for both the ‘at-risk’ subgroup, other subgroups (FSM, year group, ethnicity, sex) and all secondary students analysed. As above, practices were found to overlap more than expected, meaning the two groups (‘defined’ and ‘undefined internal provision’) were not sufficiently distinct to allow a meaningful comparison.
3. The study found substantial variation in internal provision strategies within and across IPE schools, with no shared framework for how schools support ‘at-risk’ pupils. The findings suggest that internal provision took multiple forms and that almost all schools are developing their own provision, shaped by their unique ethos, context, capacity, and student population needs.
4. The IPE schools identified a range of perceived benefits for students receiving internal provision support, including improved behaviour and attendance. However, these benefits were reported to vary between students accessing the same provision, and while for some students the support was transformational, for others it was limited or short-lived, particularly those with ongoing complex needs.

EEF security rating

The impact evaluation findings have a low security rating. The evaluation is a matched study that uses statistical methods to create matched comparison groups. This design cannot control for unobserved factors that may explain the effects, and

therefore started from a lower security level (3 out of 5 padlocks, moderate security rating). The security of the findings was further reduced by confounding risks: while schools were closely matched on a wide range of observable characteristics, unobservable factors—such as school ethos or values—are likely to influence both the adoption of approaches and outcomes. In addition, concurrent activities (for example, SEND support) may have co-occurred with the provision type and independently affected outcomes, making it difficult to isolate the effect of internal provision alone. Significant overlap between approaches further limited the distinctiveness of the comparison groups. Finally, the study was underpowered, meaning that the number of schools analysed was too small to draw robust conclusions.

Additional findings

This study contributes new insights into understanding and classifying schools’ approaches to internal provision, an area under-researched and not well understood at scale. The rich data from the IPE illuminates the complex and nuanced approaches different schools take to supporting students they believe to be ‘at risk’ of exclusion or suspension, and to reducing persistent absence. Three overarching categories of practice emerged that cut across the internal provision groupings used in the impact analysis: i) Universal support—inclusive practices potentially available to all (e.g., pastoral support, ‘safe’ support spaces, and use of relational approaches); ii) Targeted support—for those considered ‘at risk’ (e.g., counselling, mentoring, and separate internal provision units); and iii) Personalised support—including adapting the support on offer to meet individual needs (e.g., through the use of reduced/adapted timetables and alternative curricula). Across the 18 IPE schools, some features of internal provision were perceived as beneficial for reducing absence and preventing exclusion, including early identification processes and systems, tailored support, creating a sense of belonging, ‘safe’ and flexible school spaces, staff skills and training, opportunities for reintegration, and engaging parents/carers. Conversely, common barriers to delivering internal provision were reported, many of which were the same factors that led schools to offer internal provision in the first place. These included a lack of resources and available support, limited capacity/staffing, challenges in meeting complex needs and increasing demand for support, and variable levels of parental engagement with the school.


In summary, the IPE showed that the internal provision ‘choices’ being evaluated (i.e. ‘embedded’ or ‘parallel’ support) were multi-component bundles of different practices, which are used flexibly for different students within the school. As such, they represented a range of activities, which may have different impacts on student outcomes. They are also situated within the ethos and context of the school and the wider support available—this may suggest other factors (outside of the defined internal provision ‘choice’), which may have an impact on outcomes, which were not captured in the impact analysis.

Cost

Analysis of a small number of case study schools showed staff time, mainly teachers', was the largest cost for internal provision. Schools without separate internal provision units reported higher staff time, likely from more in-class support, while schools with units had much higher non-staff costs, mostly from premises and external services. These findings are indicative, limited by the small sample and differing approaches to cost reporting, and should be interpreted cautiously.

Impact

Table 2: Summary of impact^a on primary outcome(s)

Outcome / group	Effect interpretation / treatment group / comparison group	Odds ratio (95% confidence interval)	Cox Index effect size (95% confidence interval)	The EEF security rating	No. of students	P-value
Probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among the ‘at-risk’ group of students	‘Parallel’ support compared with ‘Embedded’ support	1.07 (0.90, 1.27)	0.02 (-0.03, 0.06)		37,070	0.449

^a As indicated by the padlock rating, these estimates should be interpreted with a high degree of caution and not considered causal.

Introduction

Background

Rates of exclusions and suspensions of students from school have been on an upward trajectory over the last decade; a gradual increase up to 2019, which further accelerated after the Covid-19 pandemic (DfE, 2020). The most recent available data showed there were 9,300 permanent exclusions of secondary students in the 2023/2024 academic year; a 15% increase compared to 2022/2023 (the year of the primary outcome for this study). In the same period there were 829,900 suspensions of secondary students: a 21% increase on the previous year. According to the official statistics, the most common reason for suspensions and exclusions was persistent disruptive behaviour (DfE, 2025a).

Although the sharp rise in absence rates in secondary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic appear to have stabilised, they remain high at around 9% between 2021/2022 and 2023/2024 (the most recent full year of data) (DfE, 2025b), which is considerably higher than pre-pandemic levels. In 2023/2024, one in four secondary school students (25.6%) were persistently absent (that is, they missed at least 10.0% sessions). The rate of severe absence (being absent for at least 50.0% of sessions) in secondary schools ranged from 3.1% in the Autumn Term to 4.1% by the Summer Term, across the 2023/2024 academic year (DfE, 2025b).

The official statistics also show that rates of absence, suspension, and exclusion are higher for students eligible for free school meals (FSM), students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller of Irish Heritage students (DfE 2025a; DfE, 2025b)¹. Research has shown that reasons for absence include disengagement since the Covid-19 pandemic and a breakdown in the shared understanding and responsibilities around attendance between some families and schools, long waits for mental health support or Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), and challenges for young people outside of school affecting attendance such as caring responsibilities (Children's Commissioner, 2023a).

Being suspended, excluded, or frequently absent from school increases the likelihood of negative outcomes for young people. Students with poor attendance do less well in their GCSEs (DfE 2022; Children's Commissioner 2023b). Students suspended at least once, on average, do not achieve a pass in English and maths GCSE, while those with multiple suspensions have poorer education outcomes (Joseph and Crenna-Jennings, 2024). In addition, Joseph and Crenna-Jennings (2024) also reported that being suspended multiple times was a risk factor for being permanently excluded from school, and these students were more likely to be in external alternative provision at the end of Key Stage 4. Furthermore, students suspended during secondary school are twice as likely to be not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at age 24 (Joseph and Crenna-Jennings, 2024). Separate research by Gill *et al.* (2024) highlights the link between not being in school and other negative outcomes, including lower earnings potential and unemployment, involvement in criminal activity and, exposure to youth violence.

Despite the continuing challenge, the evidence base on what works for reducing school exclusions is not yet strong in the UK. The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) concluded in a review of interventions to prevent school exclusion that they have low impact on crime and violence. These included approaches used in internal provision, such as therapeutic intervention, a focus on social and emotional skills, mentoring, and targeted academic support. However, the YEF warned that research in this area is complex and that the evidence base is limited both in terms of the number and scale of UK studies, so not enough is known about what works to reduce school exclusions (YEF, 2021).

Graham *et al.* (2019) reviewed the literature on school exclusions as part of the Timpson Review. They looked at three broad types of approaches: early (universal) support; targeted support for 'at-risk' students; and interventions involving both parents/carers and 'at-risk' students. This review reported better evidence of success in interventions that targeted families

¹ Although caution is recommended when interpreting the rates for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller of Irish Heritage children due to small population sizes.

as well as those involving multi-agency partners, but systematic evaluation was not available across the reviewed approaches.

The landscape of provision for students who are at risk of being excluded, have been excluded, or are persistently absent is complex. This includes provision that takes place within a mainstream school setting ('internal provision') and that which is 'external' or 'alternative' to mainstream school. The following sections provide definitions of these different types of provision drawing on government guidance and research and explain how provision is defined and used specifically for the purposes of this study.

Alternative provision

Alternative provision is education arranged and funded by local authorities for students who, because of exclusion, illness, or other reasons are not receiving a suitable education. Alternative provision can be state-funded alternative provision schools, such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), alternative provision academies, or alternative provision free schools. Therefore, this provision exists outside of mainstream schools, unlike internal provision (the focus of this study), which operates within a mainstream school (see below). Alternative provision can also be accessed and arranged directly by schools, usually for shorter term placements (suspension and off-site direction, i.e. where school requires a student to attend another education setting temporarily²). In addition, local authorities fund alternative provision in non-state-funded provision, including some independent schools. Placements can be long-term or shorter term, though the children in alternative provision longer term are usually those for whom neither mainstream nor special school placement is seen as appropriate (DfE, 2025c).

Alternative provision schools are typically much smaller than mainstream schools. In 2024/2025 16,643 students attended 334 state-funded alternative provision schools³: an average of just under 50 students per school (DfE, 2025d). In contrast, the average mainstream secondary school has just over 1,000 students (DfE, 2023).

There were nearly 60,000 students in all types of local authority arranged alternative provision placements,⁴ an increase of 19% from 2023/2024. Across alternative provision, student numbers have risen since Covid to exceed pre-Covid levels (DfE, 2025d).

Internal provision

Internal provision is an umbrella term used in this study for provision *within* mainstream secondaries that seeks to prevent exclusion and persistent absence. Schools may use a range of approaches in an effort to reduce exclusions and suspensions, and to reduce persistent and severe absence rates. Not only is there wide variety of provision itself, but there is also considerable variety in how schools and teachers refer to this type of support, as acknowledged by the Department for Education (DfE) (DfE, 2025e). Internal provision can go by many different names, including 'inclusion unit', 'support hub' or 'internal provision base' as well as their given names by individual schools (e.g. 'The Bridge', 'The Ark', 'The Gateway') and the specific activities and provision can differ significantly between schools, making it a varied approach.

Recent research by The Difference (Simpson and O'Brien, 2025) focused on 'internal alternative provision' and defined this as being: 'an in-school supportive intervention for children at risk of some form of exclusion or absence which acts (at least partially) in place of mainstream lessons for a specific period of time. It is part of a graduated response and includes identification of barriers to engagement with school, adaptive curriculum delivery, support with social and emotional mental health needs and support with transition either back to mainstream lessons or into an appropriate onward pathway. Internal alternative provision is usually funded by the school and is ideally part of a wider whole-school inclusion strategy'.

² Off-site direction is when a governing board of a maintained school requires a pupil to attend another education setting temporarily to improve their behaviour. Academies can arrange off-site provision for such purposes under their general powers see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66be0d92c32366481ca4918a/Suspensions_and_permanent_exclusions_guidance.pdf

³ This includes PRUs, alternative provision academies, and alternative provision free schools.

⁴ This includes education settings with the unique reference number (URN), non-maintained further education colleges, one to one tuition, other unregistered providers, registered providers with UK Provider Reference Number (UKPRN), and work-based placements.

The DfE's Behaviour in Schools guidance (DfE, 2024) provides examples of interventions that schools might put in place such as mentoring and coaching, behaviour report cards, working with external partners, and 'pupil support units' (PSUs). PSUs can be used to help with student behaviour and may be used as an approach to reduce or avoid exclusions, with the aim of reintegrating students into their mainstream classes. The guidance says that PSUs are usually used to support students from that school, but similar units that may also support students from other schools may be called 'in-school alternative provision units'.⁵ While the guidance suggests some overarching aspects of PSUs that schools should consider (about the referral process, the curriculum, staffing, reintegration processes, and involving parents/carers), there is little in the way of detailed guidance to support schools in their choices around design and delivery of internal provision more broadly.

Despite this variation in provision and language, a recent DfE survey of nearly 500 schools found that almost 70% of secondary schools either had or were planning some form of in-school alternative provision unit or PSU⁶ in 2023 (DfE, 2025e).

Research on the nature, role, and impact of internal provision in schools is in a nascent state. The DfE has conducted its own exploratory research into how a small number of internal provisions operate. In the factors contributing to success, schools emphasised the importance of relationships—between both skilled staff and students and between families and the school. The research highlighted schools' awareness of the poor outcomes of permanent exclusion and cited this as a driving factor in the development of these provisions (DfE, 2025e). The evidence base currently lacks large-scale quantitative evidence of impact. However, early and smaller scale research shows the potential of internal alternative provision to reduce suspensions. An evaluation of the approach of eight London schools over a three-year post-pandemic period found that the Excluded Initiative schools had lower suspension rates than comparison schools, showing likely positive impact of internal alternative provision (Rowland *et al.*, 2025).

Definition of internal provision used in this report

Given the varying terminology and definitions used across the sector, this report uses the phrase 'internal provision'. This broad term seeks to reflect the widest range of approaches used within mainstream schools to support students that schools perceive to be at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. This range can include separate internal provision where students receive support in a separate place (i.e. room/s or unit/s) within the school but outside their regular classroom for all/most of their taught timetable and also provision where students remain with their class and have additional support (e.g. mentoring, tutoring, or well-being support) that may take place outside the classroom. The definition of internal provision in this report also includes support for students only from that school and provision that may admit students from other nearby schools.

What is not included as part of the focus of this report are units aimed only at SEND (e.g. resourced provisions and designated units often funded by the local authority) as well as removal or isolation rooms, where students are removed from class due to their behaviour but are *not* offered additional or alternative support beyond their classroom work).

Although the research did not set out to include universal support (i.e. school support potentially available to all students, but typically provided as part of early intervention), within internal provision, and schools were not prompted to think of universal support when asked about their provision for students they considered to be at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, it was apparent from the case study school visits that at least some schools viewed elements of universal support as part of their internal provision offer. Consequently, while the focus is on specific support in place through internal provision, it is not possible to disentangle elements of universal support (as implemented by the implementation and

⁵ The placement of students from the local authority or a separate school into an in-school alternative provision unit is a form of alternative provision and those arranging and providing the placement must adhere to their legal duties, which are set out in legislation and summarised in the alternative provision statutory guidance see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision

⁶ Around 70% is the sum of schools with any kind of internal provision using this study's broad definition: the DfE research splits these into PSUs (50%) and those with in-school alternative provision units, i.e. units that may admit students from other schools (20%).

process evaluation [IPE] schools) in the findings. The implications of this for the ability to make comparisons between the analysed groups are discussed later in the report.

About this study

This project was originally commissioned in 2022 as part of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) joint funding round with the YEF: A Safe, Positive Place to Learn. The EEF and the YEF partnered to find, fund, and evaluate programmes and practices in England and Wales that could keep children safe from involvement in violence and/or improve academic attainment, by reducing absenteeism.

This is a 'School Choices' study. School leaders make choices about school-wide practices and approaches that are intended to produce positive outcomes for students, such as how to organise the school day or communicate with families. However, many school-level practices have limited or no evidence for them, which means leaders must make decisions using other information. The aim of School Choices research is to produce causal evidence about the impact of different school-level approaches and policies on outcomes of interest, with particular attention to the impact on students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The EEF and the YEF invited proposals to research how the choices made by schools lead to different outcomes in suspension, exclusion, and absence. This study was commissioned in the context of the mixed landscape of internal provision across secondary schools in England with the aim of helping to inform schools in the choices they make around the support they provide for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. This project therefore, aimed to fill some of the gaps in understanding about what internal provision looks like in different schools, and to provide some evidence about the impact of different approaches on rates of exclusions, suspensions, and absences.

Furthermore, the EEF was keen to understand more about practices that are difficult to evaluate using a randomised controlled trial (RCT) in situations where randomisation is not possible (e.g. because of school reluctance or because it would not be appropriate to randomise a particular intervention or approach). The evaluation design adopted by this study provided an opportunity to do this, as changes to a school's approach to supporting students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion would neither be appropriate for randomisation nor acceptable to schools.

School Choices evaluations are divided into two phases: a scoping phase; and an impact evaluation phase. During the scoping phase, the research team refine their research questions, verify their assumptions, and explore the feasibility of their evaluation designs. The impact phase includes an impact evaluation and an IPE.

The scoping phase was designed to gain an understanding of the range of internal provision approaches used by secondary schools to support students at risk of exclusion or persistent absence as well as to provide insights into the prevalence of these approaches. The goal was to understand how different approaches worked within a school setting, paying particular attention to the purpose, offer, access, and outcomes. It also aimed to assess the feasibility of designing an impact evaluation that could produce evidence about the impact of different types of internal provision. A summary of the findings from the scoping phase are described in the 'Methods' section of this report.

The findings from the scoping phase suggested that a quasi-experimental⁷ impact evaluation was feasible. The impact evaluation compared outcomes for students in groups of schools representing two treatment contrasts: 'parallel' versus 'embedded' support and 'internal provision' versus 'undefined provision' (see the next section on 'Choices' for an overview of each of these). The analysis was conducted at the student level, and the primary analysis involved a subgroup of students classified as at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits.⁸ Additional context on the choices made by

⁷ A non-randomised evaluation that constructs a comparison group to estimate causal impact, for example, comparing a group of individuals who received an approach with a comparison group who did not.

⁸ Students who moved between schools or who left their school to an unknown destination without a clear recorded reason. Not included in this group are those that have been permanently excluded and those with family-driven moves (i.e. students that have moved to a

schools is provided through the IPE. The IPE explored the different approaches taken by schools within each model group, examining how they operate in practice and identifying any distinguishing features to help contextualise and interpret the findings from the impact analysis.

‘Choices’ defined for this study

Latent Class Analysis (LCA)⁹ was used to statistically analyse the responses from the scoping phase survey (conducted in Autumn Term 2023) and to identify heterogeneous groups among the responding schools. It is important to note that the classifications for both treatment contrasts are based on the survey respondents’ self-report about their school’s provision. Schools were classified into each group by their probability of LCA ‘class’ membership based on their responses to a large number of survey items.

The first contrast described is between two groups, types (LCA ‘classes’) of internal provision. The key characteristics of these ‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ support groups are shown in Table 3. These groups were identified through the LCA analysis, which is described in more detail in the ‘Scoping phase methods and findings’ section. As Table 3 shows, the schools shared a common aim to support students to remain in school though their intermediate motivations were different. Schools in the ‘embedded’ support group tended to have more ‘tailored’¹⁰ provision (i.e. to support individual needs), where ‘at-risk’ students remained with their mainstream class for some or all of the time, while receiving additional support. This provision was typically provided to a larger number of students and for longer periods. Schools in the ‘parallel’ support group tended to provide more ‘standardised’ provision (i.e. where the curriculum, teaching, and support was not adapted to meet individual student needs), usually outside of mainstream education, to fewer students, and for shorter periods.

The LCA indicated that the two groups were sufficiently distinct, with 81% of schools being ‘well classified’ (i.e. the probability of being a member of one group or the other was greater than 90%). It is important to note, however, that the characterises in Table 3 do not represent absolute distinctions between schools in the two groups. Instead, they indicate average patterns, with schools being classified according to their probability of group membership based on survey responses.

Initial Theory of Changes (ToCs) were developed for each internal provision model group (see Further Appendix C).

Table 3: Key differences between schools categorised^a as offering ‘parallel’ and ‘embedded’ internal provision support

‘Parallel’ support Schools in this group have a greater probability of...	‘Embedded’ support Schools in this group have a greater probability of...
Internal provision where students receive support on the school site but separate from their mainstream class group for all/most of their taught timetable	Internal provision where students remain with their mainstream class group while they receive additional support (within and/or outside the classroom)
Led by a learning mentor or teaching assistant	Led by a senior leader
Primary goal at Key Stage 3: Give students a chance to improve before seeking to remove them from the school	Primary goal at Key Stage 3: Allow students to remain at mainstream school with ongoing support
Fewer different types of support ^b provided	More different types of support provided
Do not select standard subject lessons relevant to the needs of students attending provision, teaching not tailored, no provision of other curriculum content	Standard subject lessons selected to be relevant to the needs of students attending provision; teaching tailored to address specific gaps in students’ learning; and/or provision of other curriculum content

different geographic area, those with parents/carers in military service, and students with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller of Irish Heritage ethnicity) (Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019).

⁹ LCA was considered an appropriate methodology because its purpose matched the analytical aim of identifying unobserved subgroups/classes. Each school was assigned probability of class membership, which allowed inference about the strength of classification for each school.

¹⁰ The survey referred to ‘tailored’ and ‘standardised’ support.

Mix of standardised and bespoke support for students receiving SEMH support	Completely bespoke provision for students receiving SEMH support
Agree with the statement: 'A student who displays serious violent behaviour should be automatically excluded from the school and not allowed to return'	Neither agree nor disagree with the statement: 'A student who displays serious violent behaviour should be automatically excluded from the school and not allowed to return'
Fewer students receiving support	More students receiving support
Students typically receive support for up to a week	Students typically receive support for longer (from a month to more than a term)
Frequent contact with parents/carers for the purpose of informing them	Frequent contact/collaborative communication with parents/carers while student attends

^a Around 81% of schools were 'well classified' (i.e. the probability of being a member of one group or the other was greater than 90%).

^b For example, social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) counselling, vocational courses (see survey question 16 in Further Appendix F).

A further contrast was identified using the responses to the survey, namely:

- **'Internal provision' group.** Schools that reported having some form of 'defined internal provision' (subsequently classified into the 'embedded' and 'parallel' support groups, here combined into one group).
- **'Undefined provision' group.** Schools that reported no specific provision for students at risk of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or persistent absence, or who were unsure if any existed at their school.

At face value, it appeared that some schools had no specific provision according to their survey responses. As such, these schools were initially referred to as the 'no provision' group in the study plan for the impact evaluation (Smith, Staunton, and Martin, 2025). However, the IPE indicated that there was a much more complex picture in these schools that was harder for schools (and the research team) to define and classify (see 'IPE results' section). For this reason, this group is referred to as having 'undefined provision' throughout this report.

Evaluation objectives¹¹

Impact evaluation research questions

Table 4 below illustrates how the impact research questions were formulated. The focus of primary research question I_RQ1 is the impact of different approaches to internal provision¹² on the proportion of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit among secondary school students at risk of these outcomes. It therefore, makes the comparison between the two types of internal provision determined by the LCA.

I_RQ1: What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among secondary school students at risk¹³ of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits¹⁴?

¹¹ The study plan can be found on the EEF project page, available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/understanding-the-use-of-internal-alternative-provision-for-students-at-risk-of-persistent-absence-or-exclusion>

¹² Originally labelled in the study plan as 'internal AP', this term has been revised as definitions vary across government guidance, research and individual interpretation and are used inconsistently. The broader term 'internal provision' is used throughout this report to encompass the widest range of school support for pupils at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion.

¹³ It was not possible to use National Pupil Database (NPD) data to identify which students were exposed to internal provision in their schools, so several of the research questions were analysed using a subgroup of students who were predicted using NPD data to be 'at risk' of exclusion, suspension, or unexplained exit than their peers (see 'Participant selection' section for details of how the 'at-risk' subgroup was defined).

¹⁴ A full explanation of how the outcome measures are defined can be found in 'Outcome measures' section of this report.

I_RQ2: What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the probability of a) suspension, b) exclusion, c) unexplained exits among secondary school students at risk of a) suspension, b) exclusion, c) unexplained exits?

I_RQ3: What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among all secondary school students?

I_RQ4: What is the impact of having any internal provision on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among secondary school students at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits, compared with 'undefined provision'¹⁵?

I_RQ5: What is the impact of having any internal provision on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among all secondary school students, compared with undefined provision?

I_RQ6: What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on persistent absence among secondary school students?

I_RQ7: What is the impact of having any internal provision on persistent absence among secondary school students, compared with undefined provision?

RQ8: What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among secondary school students at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits:

- a. for FSM-eligible students?
- b. by year group (as a proxy for age)?
- c. by ethnicity?
- d. by sex?

Table 4: Overview of impact evaluation research questions

Outcome	Analysis sample	'Embedded' vs 'parallel' support	'Internal provision' vs 'Undefined provision'
Suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit	Secondary school students <i>at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits</i>	I_RQ1	I_RQ4
	Secondary school students	I_RQ3	I_RQ5
Persistent absence	Secondary school students	I_RQ6	I_RQ7
Suspension	Secondary school students at risk of suspension	I_RQ2a	
Exclusion	Secondary school students at risk of exclusion	I_RQ2b	
Unexplained school exit	Secondary school students at risk of unexplained school exit	I_RQ2c	
Suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit	Secondary school students at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits (with subgroups defined by FSM-eligibility, year group, ethnicity, and sex)	I_RQ8a-d	

IPE research questions

IPE_RQ1: What are the reasons for operating the current model of internal provision ('embedded' support, 'parallel' support, and 'undefined provision') in different schools? How do these three models differ in practice?

¹⁵ Originally labelled in the study plan as schools with 'no internal AP'. However, the IPE indicated that there was a much more complex picture in these schools that was harder for schools (and the research team) to define and classify. As these schools were providing some form of support, rather than no support at all, this group is referred to as having 'undefined provision' throughout this report.

IPE_RQ2: How does internal support for students at risk of exclusion and/or for students at risk of persistent absence operate in practice?

IPE_RQ3: What strategies and practices are used to support implementation?

IPE_RQ4: What are the implications of operating the current model of internal provision for other students and staff in the school?

Ethics and evaluation registration

The project was subject to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) ethics review as part of the start-up meeting for the initial scoping phase. This involved checking the project against the NFER Code of Practice¹⁶ checklist. The project complied with the Code of Practice and no issues requiring escalation were identified.

Schools were invited to take part in the research through the scoping phase survey, which also included the opportunity for the respondent to express interest in taking part in a follow-up interview. By completing the survey, and in the case of school leaders who agreed to take part in a follow-up interview, they agreed to participate in the research.

In case study schools, school leaders shared a project information sheet with school staff selected to participate in an interview as part of the visit. Individual staff members gave their own agreement to participate. A separate opt-in consent process was used for participation in student and parent/carer interviews. Given that students participating in this study were at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion were considered vulnerable it was especially important to ensure that parents/carers had the option to specifically consent to their child participating in this evaluation activity. Schools provided parents/carers with a written information sheet about the interviews containing full details about what their child would be asked to do. Parents/carers were then asked to provide written opt-in consent of their willingness for their child to be invited to participate in by returning a consent form to the school, which passed this information on to the research team. Student participation in the interviews was voluntary, therefore, even if a parent/carer had given consent for their child to participate, their child could still choose not to take part. Age-appropriate information about the interviews was provided to students at the same time as parents/carers received information about the interviews to allow them to discuss participation together. The researchers also read this information to students at the beginning of the interview if at this point a student decided that they would prefer not to participate, then they were able to return to their class. Individual parents/carers gave their own agreement to participate in interviews. Prior to beginning the student and the parent/carer interviews, researchers outlined the circumstances they would need to break confidentiality to ensure safeguarding. There was one disclosure during a case study visit which was logged following the processes set out for the project, and student data was passed on to the school in that instance.

The impact evaluation was registered with Open Science Framework.¹⁷

Data protection

NFER and The Difference ensured all work streams were compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (GDPR, 2016). NFER has ISO27001 and Cyber Essentials Plus certifications and both organisations are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). All data gathered during this project was held in accordance with these data protection frameworks and treated in the strictest confidence.

NFER was the data controller and The Difference was a data processor on this study, up to the data deletion date. The EEF is the data controller for the dataset once archived. The legal basis for processing the personal data of data subjects is covered by GDPR Article 6 (1) (f): 'Legitimate interests: the processing is necessary for your (or a third party's) legitimate

¹⁶ See: www.nfer.ac.uk/media/cgpl42av/nfer_code_of_practice.pdf.

¹⁷ See: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/24WRU>

interests unless there is a good reason to protect the individual's personal data which overrides those legitimate interests' (GDPR, 2016).

A legitimate interest assessment was carried out, which demonstrated that the evaluation fulfilled one of NFER's core business purposes (undertaking research, evaluation, and information activities). The project has broader societal benefits and will contribute to improving the lives of learners by providing evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches used by schools to support students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. It was therefore, determined that there was legitimate interest to process and analyse personal data for the evaluation. All personal data collected was deemed essential for fulfilling the research objectives, and the proposed activities were assessed as unlikely to cause any undue harm to the data subjects.

In order for the evaluation to explore the impact of different approaches to internal provision on the proportion of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit, personal data (including special data e.g. ethnicity, language, SEND provision and type, and number of authorised sessions missed due to student absence) was obtained from the NPD. The DfE provided NFER with de-identified student data from NPD. Such extracts had the names and unique pupil numbers (UPNs) replaced. This is still considered personal data because information could be combined to identify a student.

A separate legal basis was identified for processing special data. Our legal basis for processing special data is covered by GDPR Article 9 (2) (j):

Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes in accordance with Article 89(1) based on Union or Member State law which shall be proportionate to the aim pursued, respect the essence of the right to data protection and provide for suitable and specific measures to safeguard the fundamental rights and the interests of the data subject (GDPR, 2016).

NFER accessed the NPD data for analysis through the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service (SRS) secure online system. The SRS system does not allow users to remove or copy data from its servers. At the end of the EEF evaluations, data is archived to allow for further secondary analysis. As part of this project pseudonymised student-level data will be added to the EEF archive via the SRS. This data set will contain school-level treatment groups ('parallel' support, 'embedded' support, 'undefined provision', 'any internal provision'), the primary outcome measure (including derived 'unexplained exits') and an indicator column identifying students included in the 'at-risk' analyses.

Privacy information was provided to all data subjects in an accessible and transparent manner through project-specific and participant-specific privacy notices and information sheets tailored to each participant group (see Further Appendix D and Further Appendix E). Contact details for the project; NFER compliance officer and the ICO were made available for all participants, through the privacy notices, to ask questions or raise concerns about the processing of their data.

No interviewee (school staff, parents/carers, or student) names, nor the name of any school, are reported. NFER and The Difference will not share personal data collected through the survey or interviews with other organisations. Personal data relating to the study will be deleted one year after the publication of the report.

Project team

Table 5: Project team

Partnership research team	Role
NFER	
Helen Poet, Research Director	Project director, primarily responsible for intellectual leadership and project oversight of impact evaluation.
Caroline Sharp, Research Director—scoping phase and start of impact phase	Project director, primarily responsible for intellectual leadership and project oversight of scoping phase and design and set-up of the impact phase.
Kerry Martin, Research Manager—impact phase	Project leader, responsible for overseeing the day-to-day management at the end of the scoping phase and throughout the impact evaluation.
Roland Marden, Research Manager—scoping phase	Project leader, responsible for project set-up and day-to-day management of the early phase of the scoping phase.
Andrew Smith, Senior Evaluation Analyst	Analyst, working on statistical analysis and reporting.
Ruth Staunton, Senior Statistician	Lead statistician, responsible for statistical analysis.
Sarah Tang, Research Manager	Researcher, working on the scoping phase and the impact phase IPE and cost analysis.
Geeta Gambhir, Researcher	Researcher, working on the IPE.
Ben Styles, Co-Head of UK Policy and Practice	Expert adviser.
Guvi Cohan, Senior Project and Delivery Manager	Research operations lead, responsible for overseeing the administration of the scoping phase school survey.
The Difference	
Ellie Harris, Director of Policy, Impact, Research, and Communications	Responsible for overseeing the project at The Difference.
Jen Graham, Research Associate	Inclusion expert/researcher working on the scoping phase and the IPE.
Emma Simpson, Senior Research Manager	Researcher, working on the IPE.
External advisers	
Dave Thomson, Chief Statistician, FFT DataLab	School inclusion index expert, providing expert input on statistical modelling and outcome measures.

Methods

Scoping phase methods and findings

The scoping phase of this study ran from October 2022 to March 2024.¹⁸ It aimed to explore secondary schools' internal provision approaches, including their key characteristics and prevalence, and whether sufficiently distinct groupings of schools could be determined to make a quasi-experimental evaluation viable. Other specific criteria for progressing to an impact evaluation were that:

1. The number of survey responses exceeded the required survey sample size of 420 (478 schools ultimately responded).
2. Two groups of internal provision were identified in the LCA of survey responses (plus one 'undefined provision' group). As discussed later in this section, statistics generated by the LCA indicated that the classification process worked satisfactorily and that the groups appeared to be sufficiently distinct.
3. The distribution of the number schools across the groups was reasonably balanced (resulted in a 60%/40% split).
4. The assumption of common support (overlap in characteristics) between schools within subgroups had been sufficiently met to allow matching. This was tested and confirmed at the end of the scoping phase.

The scoping phase itself was conducted in two stages.

Stage 1: Interviews and case studies to identify dimensions of practice

Expert interviews and school case studies were conducted between November 2022 and March 2023 with the aim of understanding how different approaches to internal provision work within a school setting, paying particular attention to the purpose, offer, access, and outcomes.

Online interviews were conducted with eight expert advisers to identify a range of internal provision practices in schools. The experts, identified through practitioner networks, included specialists in internal provision in mainstream settings, Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) executive leads for behaviour management/inclusion and alternative provision sector leaders.

Case studies visits were made to 12 schools deploying different approaches to supporting students at risk of absence and/or exclusion. Schools were identified via the expert interviews, practice networks, and open calls to participate from NFER, The Difference, and the EEF. Each case study comprised in-person interviews with the strategic decision-maker(s) for internal provision in the school and the staff member(s) responsible for implementation. The schools' internal provision facilities were also visited to gather further information on their operation. In total, 27 interviews were conducted in 12 case study schools, supplemented by relevant documentation (such as behaviour policies). Data was analysed thematically in order to identify key features/dimensions of provision suitable for further investigation.

Overall, interviews with experts and case study schools indicated that support for students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence was a complex picture. Schools adopted a range of alternative provision-related terminology and did not necessarily recognise or use the DfE terms 'PSU' or in-school alternative provision units. In addition, school provision appeared to vary considerably, including:

- the extent to which they took responsibility for supporting a student at risk of persistent absence or permanent exclusion;

¹⁸ The dates for the scoping phase activities reported in this final report differ from those set out in the initial study plan. The timeline was updated during the course of the study to reflect operational considerations and the actual period during which data were gathered.

- whether they have no internal provision or some provision;
- whether or not they focus on early intervention (e.g. early in Key Stage 3); and
- how personalised the support is.

The following key dimensions of practice were also identified by interviewees as likely to be important to student outcomes:

- removal, reintegration, re-engagement in education;
- relationships (between staff and students and between schools and families);
- structural quality: staffing and governance;
- missing learning from mainstream lessons; and
- responding to complex needs.

Together these findings were used to inform the design of the school survey in terms of its structure, the key issues to be explored and the internal provision-related terminology used.

Stage 2: Survey to quantify the prevalence of different models of internal provision

The evidence base developed during Stage 1 was used to design an online survey (see Further Appendix F) This stage sought to address the following research questions:

Scoping_RQ1: What are the different approaches to internal provision employed by schools?

Scoping_RQ2: What is the pattern of responses for each question?

Scoping_RQ3: How feasible is an impact evaluation using administrative data from the sample of schools which responded to the survey?

The survey focused on provision for students at risk of persistent absence and/or permanent exclusion. A definition of 'internal provision' was not provided in the survey to allow respondents to interpret the term based on their own school context, enabling the research to explore how internal provision is understood and implemented in practice and to identify variations in interpretation across different schools.

It was recognised that the research could not capture data on all aspects of provision in a closed-response short survey and that there was a need to focus on the specific practices that the interviews highlighted were most likely to be important and distinctive. The survey included routing for schools with/without separate internal provision units and by key stage. The questions focused on the key dimensions that characterised different internal provision approaches identified in the qualitative interviews. The survey had five main sections:

- school position (attitudes) in relation to attendance, behaviour, and exclusion;
- the level of need (the percentage of all students estimated to be currently at risk of permanent exclusion in the school);
- access to and quality of external alternative provision locally;
- school provision for students at risk of exclusion (at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4); and
- barriers for schools in offering additional provision.

Respondents (secondary school senior leaders) were also invited to register their schools' interest in taking part in a further stage of the study. The draft survey was piloted with a small number of school leaders, which resulted in some changes to phrasing and routing within the survey.

The online survey was sent to all publicly funded secondary schools in England between September 2023 and October 2023 and targeted reminders were employed to help to achieve quotas.¹⁹ As the survey respondents formed the sample of schools for the impact evaluation, the required response rate was based on an initial sample size calculation for the impact analysis (see 'Sample size' section for further details).

The survey resulted in a total of 478 responses (out of a possible 3,452 publicly funded secondary schools in England in the academic year 2023/2024²⁰), providing a detailed picture of the extent of different approaches deployed by schools, capturing common features of different approaches, implementation, and contextual factors. Responses were weighted so that the survey sample was representative of English secondary schools for three school characteristics (region, percentage of pupils eligible for FSM, percentage of pupils with SEND). Survey questions were analysed by FSM-eligibility (quintiles: lowest 20% to highest 20%) percentage of pupils with SEND support/SEND without an EHCP (0.1% to 10.0%, 10.1% to 20.0%, and 20.1% to 30.0% and above), and region.

Findings from the school survey provide insights into senior leaders' attitudes and perspectives regarding absence and exclusion. Leaders in almost all schools (98%) agree that attendance is a shared responsibility between a school, student, and parents/carers. However, 26% felt that schools should not be held solely responsible for student absence. In addition, most schools (73%) agree that permanent exclusion should be avoided unless the student poses a serious risk to themselves or others. However, 39% of schools agree that a student who displays serious violent behaviour should be automatically excluded from the school and not allowed to return.

At the time of the survey, most schools estimated 1% of their students were at risk of permanent exclusion. This equated to roughly ten students in an average-sized secondary school of around 1,000 students. The level of student need varied significantly by rates of FSM. Fewer of the most disadvantaged schools report having no students at risk of permanent exclusion.

Most schools (91%) had access to external alternative provision schools/providers locally, but perceived quality was mixed. Of the schools that had access to external alternative provision, 23% said they offered high-quality provision 'to a great extent' while 62% answered it was high quality 'to some extent' (Figure 1). One in 12 schools felt that the external alternative provision was not high quality (8%). There were regional differences, with schools in London significantly more positive about the quality of external alternative provision available to them than schools in other regions ($p=0.012$).

Schools responding to the survey differed in the support they provided. Around two-thirds had some form of provision²¹ specifically for students at risk of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or for students at risk of persistent absence. Schools with higher proportions of students eligible for FSM were identified as being more likely to have some form of provision than those with lower proportions of FSM students.

Almost 40% of schools ($n=180$)²² had 'undefined provision' specifically for students who were at risk of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or persistent absence, even though most (83%) of these same schools with 'undefined provision' reported having students at risk of permanent exclusion on their roll. Based on the expert interviews in the scoping phase,

¹⁹ Quotas were based on school characteristics (e.g. percentage of students with characteristics known to be associated with exclusion such as FSM eligibility, SEN students with support, and region).

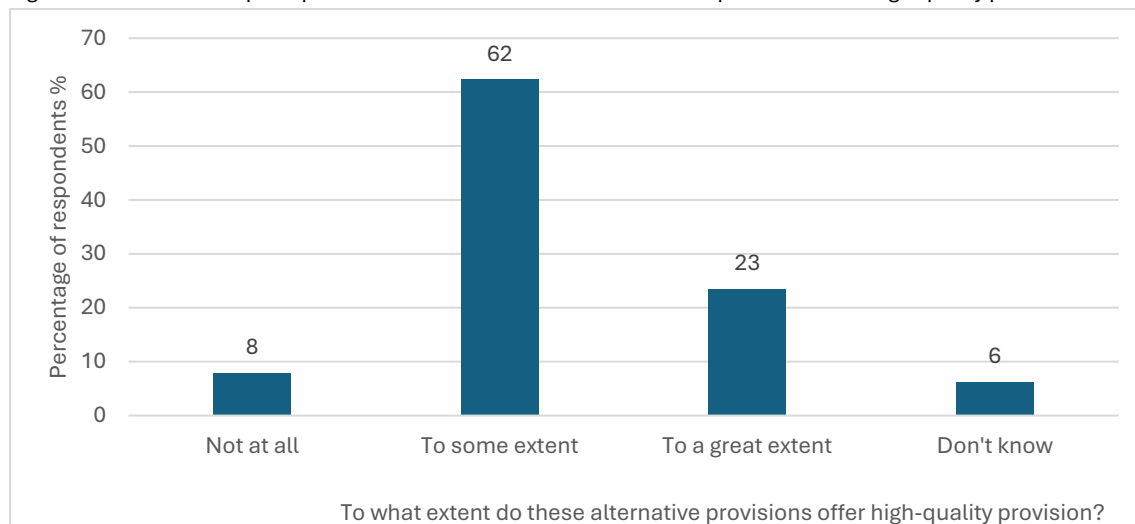
²⁰ See: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2023-24#dataBlock-607bea45-116e-4066-9ed8-f5a7797f5530-tables>

²¹ Note that isolation/reflection rooms were not considered as 'provision' for the purposes of the survey although many secondary schools use these as part of behaviour management.

²² The 'undefined provision' group includes ten respondents who said they did not have any provision and those who were not aware of any offer.

possible explanations for this were that these schools: were either referring students to external alternative provision settings (either on a temporary or permanent basis); were using off-site directions²³ or managed moves²⁴ to other mainstream schools; using suspension; exclusion; and/or ‘off-rolling’ (i.e. persuading families to remove their children to avoid a formal exclusion) or had a support offer that was not recognised as distinct within the school, but instead part of everyday inclusive teaching strategies, pastoral systems, and staffing approaches.

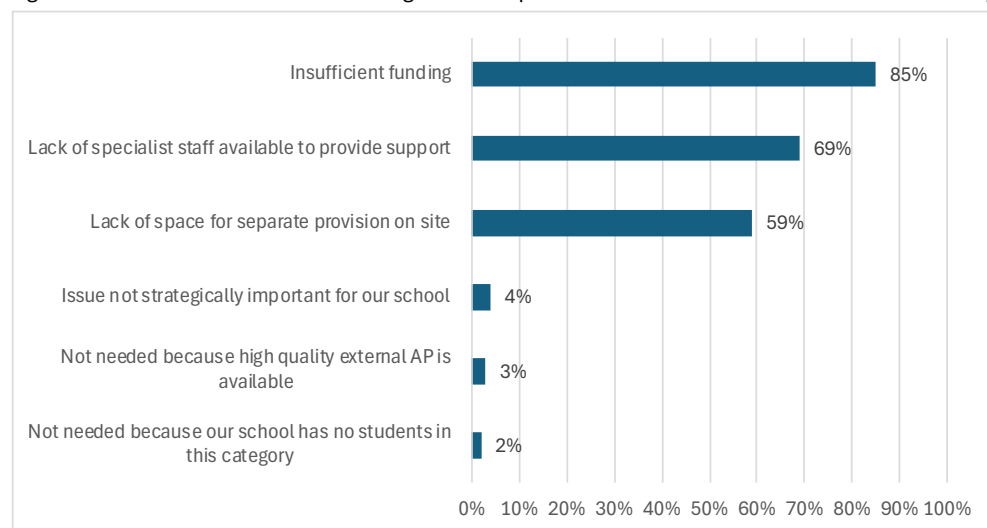
Figure 1: Senior leaders’ perceptions of whether local external alternative provisions offer high-quality provision



Source: NFER scoping phase school survey of internal provision of publicly funded mainstream secondary schools in England, 2023. N= 430.

At the time of the survey, insufficient funding, staff, and space were the main barriers for all schools in offering additional internal provision (as shown in Figure 2). Schools with ‘undefined provision’ were significantly more likely to report that lack of space was a barrier (p=0.02).

Figure 2: Main barriers for schools offering additional provision for students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence



Source: NFER scoping phase school survey of internal provision of publicly funded mainstream secondary schools in England, 2023. N=434.

²³ Off-site direction is when a governing board of a maintained school requires a pupil to attend another education setting temporarily to improve their behaviour. Academies can arrange off-site provision for such purposes under their general powers see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66be0d92c32366481ca4918a/Suspensions_and_permanent_exclusions_guidance.pdf

²⁴ A managed move is used to initiate a process, which leads to the transfer of a pupil to another mainstream school permanently. Managed moves should be voluntary and agreed with all parties involved, including the parents and the admission authority of the new school see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66be0d92c32366481ca4918a/Suspensions_and_permanent_exclusions_guidance.pdf

Most of the schools responding to the survey with internal provision specifically for students who were at risk of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or persistent absence (n=298) provided support for students in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, other schools provided internal provision to students in either one key stage or the other. The characteristics of the provision reported was broadly similar across key stages, although more schools focused on vocational education in Key Stage 4. Just over half of schools with internal provision had the same support for persistently absent students as those at risk of exclusion (55%).

Most schools responding to the survey with some form of separate internal provision did not provide support for students from other schools, but around a fifth (19%) did, typically supporting two students at a time.²⁵

LCA of scoping phase survey responses

Given the rich and varying patterns of data represented by the survey responses, LCA was used to identify heterogeneous ‘classes’ of schools. LCA is a statistical procedure used to identify qualitatively different subgroups (‘classes’) within a sample (Weller, Bowen, and Faubert, 2020). LCA uses responses to categorical indicator variables (responses to survey questions in this evaluation) in order to determine classifications. Although usually these would be referred to as ‘classes’ in reporting, given the overlap in phrasing with taught classes in schools, this report refers to the LCA ‘classes’ as groups in our main reporting from here on.

For this evaluation the LCA used survey responses and identified two groups of internal provision, which were subsequently labelled by the research team as ‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ support. It also suggested that schools reporting ‘undefined provision’ may form two groups (see details in Table 6 below), but with only 10% (n=18) of the schools in one of the groups, and few survey items to clarify the distinction between the groups, the ‘undefined provision’ schools were treated as one group for the impact analysis.

Table 6: Results of the LCA of the school survey

Support for students at risk of exclusion or persistent absence	LCA best fit	Differences between groups
‘Undefined provision’ (180 schools)	Two group solution, unequally divided (10% and 90%)	The second group appeared generally more tolerant of behavioural issues and less likely to have access to external provision than the first group (based on responses to eight attitudinal statements).
‘Internal provision’ (298 schools)	Two group solution, more equally divided (60% ‘parallel’ and 40% ‘embedded’ support)	The second group (‘embedded’ support) were more likely than the first group (‘parallel’ support) to have features highlighted as important during interviews with experts and case study schools, such as a commitment to more integrated, extensive, ongoing, and tailored support led by a senior leader.

Two internal provision approaches were determined by the LCA

The two groups of internal provision shown in Table 3 in the ‘Choices defined for this study’ section were determined by the LCA from those schools (n=298), which indicated that they have some form of internal provision. These two groups have been labelled ‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ support. Individual schools have accordingly been classified as belonging to one of the two groups—this classification is based on a probability of group membership, which is contingent on the responses given to a large number of survey items. Table 3 indicates some of the key (statistically significant) differences between schools categorised in the two groups, with those labelled ‘embedded’ support generally providing a pattern of responses, which suggest a commitment to more integrated, extensive, ongoing, and tailored support led by a senior leader (a full list of survey questions used as indicator variables in the LCA can be found in Further Appendix G).

The LCA performed well in terms of its statistical properties, with 81% of schools being well classified (the probability of being a member of one group or the other >90%). It is important to note, however, that LCA group membership is

²⁵ Schools doing this must follow the Alternative Provision Statutory Guidance and students must be registered at both schools see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fcf72fad3bf7f5d0a67ace7/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_accessible.pdf

probabilistic, and therefore, it is not necessarily the case that picking one school from each group would provide evidence for the sharp contrasts indicated in Table 3. LCA creates groupings based on units' probability of group membership determined from a set of indicator variables. This means that units (schools) assigned to the same group are likely to share similar characteristics across many indicator variables. However, schools assigned to different groups may also have similar characteristics, on some indicator variables and also in other ways, which are unobserved by the research. This has implications for understanding how distinctive the different groups are likely to be, and is a limitation of LCA as a methodology, discussed further in the 'Conclusion' section of this report.

Impact evaluation phase methods

Impact evaluation design

The impact evaluation used entropy balancing to create statistically similar²⁶ groups of schools representing the two treatment contrasts indicated by Table 6 above (i.e. 'embedded' support vs 'parallel' support; and 'internal provision' vs 'undefined provision'), with analysis at the student level. Unobserved differences between groups are a concern when using methods such as these, as it may not be possible to control for them through balancing, thereby potentially undermining inferences about causality. This limitation is discussed in more detail in the 'Conclusion' section of this report.

Table 7: Evaluation design

Evaluation design		Entropy balancing (school level)
Unit of analysis		Students
Number of units included in primary analysis ^a ('at-risk' group, 'embedded' vs 'parallel' support)		'Embedded' support: 12,910 (in 66 schools) 'Parallel' support: 24,160 (in 118 schools)
Primary outcome ^b	Variable	Suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit (≥ 1 in 2022/2023 academic year)
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	Binary; created from NPD variables
Secondary outcome(s) ^b	Variable(s)	(i) Persistent absence (in 2022/2023 academic year) (ii) Suspension (in 2022/2023 academic year) (iii) Exclusion (in 2022/2023 academic year) (iv) Unexplained school exit (in 2022/2023 academic year)
	Measure(s) (instrument, scale, source)	(i) Binary; defined in NPD (ii) Binary; defined in NPD (iii) Binary; defined in NPD (iv) Binary; created from NPD variables
Baseline for primary outcome	Variable	Number of suspensions and exclusions experienced by a student during their primary school education (Reception to Year 6)
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	Continuous; created from NPD variables

²⁶ In terms of specific school characteristics used in the entropy balancing process. Entropy balancing gives covariate balance across treatment and comparison groups, using weighting methods to create statistically similar groups.

Baseline for secondary outcome(s)	Variable	<p>Research questions focusing on suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained exits</p> <p>Number of suspensions and exclusions experienced by a student during their primary school education (Reception to Year 6)</p> <p>Research questions focusing on persistent absence</p> <p>Proportion of sessions recorded as absent (both authorised and unauthorised) during the academic year 2017/2018</p>
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	<p>Research questions focusing on suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained exits</p> <p>Continuous; created from NPD variables</p> <p>Research questions focusing on persistent absence</p> <p>Continuous; created from NPD variables</p>

^a The total number of schools included in the primary analysis (n=184) is fewer than the total number of schools, which responded to the survey (n=478) specified by the project's study plan, Smith, Staunton, and Martin, 2025). This is because 180 schools with 'undefined provision' were not included in the primary analysis (see also 'Sample identification strategy' below).

^b See 'Outcome measures' section for further details about how outcomes were defined.

The use of school-level entropy balancing was specified in the study plan (Smith, Staunton, and Martin, 2025) as an alternative to Propensity Score Matching (PSM), should PSM be difficult to implement. In a departure from the study plan (which was discussed with the Study Advisory Board [SAB] and the EEF), entropy balancing was used as the method of first choice, with other matching methods being used for robustness checks. Entropy balancing (see 'Selection mechanism, comparison group, and identification assumptions' section below) was prioritised as it is simple to implement without an initial step of restricting the sample of schools to be matched to those under 'common support' (i.e. having sufficient overlap in characteristics). Entropy balancing maximises the potential sample size, something which was a motivating factor given that the research questions included a subset of the schools (based on survey responses about when schools started their provision) which responded to the survey.

The population analysed were students in Years 7 to 11 on roll at the start of the 2022/2023 academic year in a sample of publicly funded mainstream English secondary schools. This sample was derived from schools (n=478) in which a senior member of staff responded to a survey investigating schools' approaches to reducing persistent absence and exclusions. Primary analysis included only the subset of the population of students identified as being 'at risk' of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits in the 2022/2023 academic year using a data-driven classification method (see 'Defining the 'at-risk' group' section below). This restriction was specified to increase the statistical power of the analysis by increasing the baseline proportion of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits. The NPD data did not identify which students had actually been exposed to their schools' internal provision, and using this subset theoretically increased the likelihood of the students included in the primary analysis having been treated.

The primary outcome was derived from NPD variables to give a combined binary outcome indicating whether a pupil had a recorded suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit during the 2022/2023 academic year. Secondary outcomes were persistent absence and each component of the combined outcome (suspension, exclusion, and unexplained school exits) separately. Details of how each outcome was derived can be found in the 'Outcome measures' section below.

Participant selection

Sample identification strategy

All outcomes were measured using data from the 2022/2023 academic year. While 478 schools responded to the scoping phase survey, primary and secondary analysis was restricted to exclude schools whose survey responses indicated that they started or revised their provision during or after the 2022/2023 academic year. This restriction was applied as it would be unlikely that the stated provision in these schools would have had the opportunity to impact the outcomes of interest. Of the 478 schools responding to the survey, 298 indicated having some form of internal provision. In total, 184 remained in

the sample when those which reported that they started or revised their provision during or after 2022/2023 were excluded.²⁷ Impact research questions focusing on the treatment contrast between different types of provision (I_RQ1, I_RQ2, I_RQ3, I_RQ6, and I_RQ8) therefore, included only these 184 schools, which indicated having some type of provision, which had not been implemented or revised during or after the 2022/2023 academic year. Impact research questions focusing on the treatment contrast between any type of provision and 'undefined provision' included a total of 364 schools (184 plus 180 which indicated 'undefined provision'). This treatment contrast also did not include any schools, which reported that they started or revised their provision during or after 2022/2023.

It was not possible to identify which students were exposed to internal provision, so analysis of the primary outcome was conducted using two different student samples:

- secondary school students estimated to be at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits; and
- all secondary school students.

Defining the 'at-risk' groups

An evidence-based approach was used to define the 'at-risk' groups, to increase the likelihood that these students had been exposed to their schools' approach to internal provision, and to also increase the statistical power of the study by increasing the baseline proportion of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits. This therefore, increased the statistical power of the study, and its ability to detect differences between the study groups.²⁸ The approach used a cross-sectional (2022/2023) cohort of students²⁹ in open, maintained, English secondary schools that *did not* respond to the scoping phase survey. These schools were selected as those that most closely mirrored the survey responders, but without introducing bias by including any of our study schools. We assessed summary statistics for several school-level characteristics (phase, region, percentage FSM), comparing the non-responding school sample to the schools which had responded, with the intention of excluding schools from the non-responding sample if major differences in these characteristics were apparent (e.g. if no schools responded to the survey from a particular region, schools from that region would not be included in the predictive models). However, no exclusion from the non-responding sample was deemed necessary as these characteristics were considered similar enough which is demonstrated in the baseline characteristics tables (Table 14 and Table 15). The prediction model data set contained data for 2,651,160 students from 3,073 schools. Several types of classification models (logistic regression, random forests, support vector machine) were built and employed a train/test approach (70%/30% of schools) to select the model that best³⁰ predicted whether students would be noted as excluded/suspended in the NPD or defined as an unexplained exit during the 2022/2023 academic year. Predictor variables included in the analysis were gender, age/year group, ethnicity, FSM-eligibility,³¹ language, service child, SEND provision, Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) score, young carer indicator, Key Stage 2 maths score, Key Stage 2 reading score, Child Protection Plan (CPP) indicator, Child Looked After (CLA) indicator, proportion of absent sessions at primary level, and experience of suspension or exclusion at primary level. This model was then applied to the students in

²⁷ 57 schools did not report when provision was adopted or significantly changed. These were not excluded from primary analysis as we determined it probable that their provision was not adopted nor significantly changed during or after 2022/2023. To determine the effect of their inclusion we ran sensitivity analysis excluding them.

²⁸ We did not limit our measure of persistent absence to those at risk of persistent absence for two reasons: because the number of students involved was insufficient and because post-Covid the risk profile for persistent absence was less predictable. Absence in 2022/2023: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2022-23>

²⁹ This was initially planned to be a historic cohort but considering the recommendations of the SAB to develop the predictive model using data from post-pandemic years, we opted to use students in the same academic year as our outcome, but in schools other than our study population.

³⁰ Best was determined by comparison of the sensitivity (true positives/actual positives) and positive predictive value (true positives/predicted positives) of the models when applied to the test data set. True positives are those that were predicted to be positive by the model and were actually positive. Actual positives are those that were actually positive i.e. the sum of true positives and false negatives.

³¹ The NPD variable used to define FSM eligibility throughout these analyses was EVERFSM_6. This is a flag, which indicates if a student has ever been recorded as eligible for FSM on Census day in any termly or annual Census in the last six years up to the student's current year (not including nursery).

the study schools to enable identification of the subgroup of students whom the model determined had the highest probability of exclusion, suspension, and/or unexplained exit (top 20% within each school³²). This process was repeated three further times for each outcome separately in I_RQ2a, I_RQ2b, and I_RQ2c. Although the statistics, particularly sensitivity, were small (see Appendix B), for all four predictive model sets, the logistic regression model performed best. The aim of this approach was not to perfectly predict which students would experience any of the outcomes, but to select a subgroup where the outcomes were more likely to occur and thereby select students who were more likely to have experience in the internal provision provided by their school. Based on the increase in model means where models were analysing the ‘at-risk’ subset, the first part of the aim was achieved, but the second part is not possible to test and remains an assumption.

This analysis was expected to identify some characteristics as more strongly related than others to a student’s risk of suspension, exclusion, or unexplained exit. These are reported in Table 8 below to illustrate the relative importance of each characteristic for predicting the likelihood of the outcome measure. This enabled the study to explain the ‘at-risk’ concept in more concrete terms, by referring to the most salient characteristics making up the profile of an ‘at-risk’ student.

Table 8: The relative importance^a of student characteristics for the best fit predictive models

	Combined outcome predictive model	Exclusions predictive model	Suspensions predictive model	Unexplained exits predictive model
Most important feature	FSM-eligibility	FSM-eligibility	FSM-eligibility	Ethnicity
	Ethnicity	CPP indicator	Year group	Year group
	IDACI score	SEND provision	IDACI score	FSM-eligibility
	SEND provision	Ethnicity	Gender	SEND provision
	Year group	Year group	SEND provision	Gender
	Gender	IDACI score	CPP indicator	CPP indicator
	CPP indicator	Gender	Ethnicity	Key Stage 2 maths score
	Key Stage 2 maths score	Key Stage 2 reading score	Key Stage 2 maths score	Language
	Key Stage 2 reading score	Language	Key Stage 2 reading score	IDACI score
	CLA indicator	CLA indicator	CLA indicator	Primary suspension or exclusion
	Service child	Key Stage 2 maths score	Language	Key Stage 2 reading score
	Primary suspension or exclusion	Primary absence	Primary absence	Primary absence
	Language	Primary suspension or exclusion	Primary suspension or exclusion	CLA indicator
	Primary absence	Service child	Young carer	Young carer
Least important feature	Young carer	Young carer	Service child	Service child

^a The table ranks the characteristics in terms of their relative importance (most to least) for predicting the likelihood of the outcome measure; the distance between each characteristic in terms of its importance varies.

Selection mechanism, comparison group, and identification assumptions

The study employed two different treatment contrasts:

- ‘embedded’ support versus ‘parallel’ support (I_RQ1, I_RQ2, I_RQ3, I_RQ6, and I_RQ8); and
- ‘internal provision’ versus ‘undefined provision’ (I_RQ4, I_RQ5, and I_RQ7).

³² The threshold of 20% was selected because FSM students comprise roughly 20% of all students and the increase in exclusions/suspensions that was anticipated by looking at this subset (described later in the ‘Sample size’ section) was based on the increase that we see in these outcomes for FSM students.

The first contrast was indicated by the LCA using survey responses to determine the probability of group membership. The second was indicated by responses to a survey question, which asked respondents whether their school had provision specifically for students who were at risk of exclusion due to challenging behaviour and/or for students at risk of persistent absence. From the scoping phase, it was apparent that that the ‘undefined provision’ group could include schools that: were referring students to external alternative provision settings (either on a temporary or permanent basis); were using managed moves or off-site directions to other mainstream schools; employed suspension; exclusion; and/or ‘off-rolling’ (i.e. persuading families to remove their children to avoid a formal exclusion) or had a support offer that was not recognised as distinct within the school, but instead part of everyday inclusive teaching strategies, pastoral systems, and staffing approaches.

For each treatment contrast it was necessary to create statistically similar counterfactual groups, for example, to ensure that schools in the ‘parallel’ support group were statistically similar to those in the ‘embedded’ support group, and schools in the ‘undefined provision’ group were statistically similar to those in the internal provision group. This was achieved by entropy balancing using the balancing variables listed below to assign weights to schools in both groups³³ and resulted in two balanced groups of schools, one for each of the treatment contrasts. The process of entropy balancing is similar to that of matching on the propensity score, a relevant example of which was published by (Weidmann and Miratrix, 2020). Their work demonstrated that, for attainment outcomes, the magnitude of bias in impact estimates in naive (and non-randomised) comparisons can be reduced to an acceptable level by school-level matching. This evaluation makes the assumption that the Weidmann and Miratrix (2020) findings also hold true for non-attainment outcomes and also employed a strategy to balance at the school (rather than student) level, given that this method had previously been established as likely to be effective by previously published research.³⁴

Entropy balancing was used instead of PSM for all primary, secondary, and subgroup analyses despite the fact that the study plan (Smith, Staunton, and Martin, 2025) specified the latter as the default method of creating comparison groups (although entropy balancing had been identified in the study plan as a potential alternative). Implementing entropy balancing did not require the inclusion of only the schools, which shared common support, hence, the maximum available sample size was retained.

Rather than using a method which estimates the probability (using a propensity score) of a school being ‘treated’, entropy balancing (Hainmueller, 2012) creates statistically similar treatment and comparison groups by weighting to achieve covariate balance. The same covariates which would be used to estimate propensity scores are used by the entropy balancing process, with weights being assigned to units (schools in this case) to adjust for imbalances in these covariates.

For each treatment contrast, balancing was applied at a school level, to account for covariates (using covariate moments – means in this instance) that are most associated with the national rate of pupil exclusion.³⁵ Balancing variables therefore included:

- historic school-level % exclusion and % absence in academic years 2017/2018 (selected as prior to pandemic restrictions, which will have an impact on exclusion/absence numbers);
- region;
- mean teacher pay in 2022/2023;

³³ To estimate the Average Treatment Effect.

³⁴ Student-level characteristics are nonetheless controlled for in statistical models (see ‘Statistical analysis’ section below).

³⁵ As described by education statistics for the 2021/2022 academic year. See: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england/2021-22-summer-term>. Note that to avoid overspecifying the models we did not include all variables with any association with pupil exclusion, only those most associated. The balance achieved for all of these variables is reported in Table 14, along with two school level variables that were not used as balancing variables (phase and Ofsted rating) but are included to align with EEF reporting practice.

- pupil to qualified teacher ratio;
- % FSM-eligible students;
- % English as an Additional Language (EAL) students;
- % SEND students; and
- a school attainment measure e.g. Progress 8,³⁶ lagged so as not to include any students in the analysis sample.

Sample size

The maximum sample size for the impact analysis was determined by the number of surveys returned, the target for which was informed by preliminary calculations prior to the commencement of the scoping phase. These determined that 420 schools (a response rate of 13% of all publicly funded secondary schools in England) would need to return the survey to achieve a Minimum Detectable Odds Ratio (MDOR) of 1.06. This estimate was based on the following assumptions:

- comparison between two groups of schools;
- a mean of 1,000 students per secondary school (with a standard deviation [SD] of 250);³⁷
- a baseline rate of exclusion or suspension of around 10% for all students;³⁸
- analysis of 200 students per secondary school (an 'at-risk' subset of students who hold characteristics that are at higher risk of exclusion);
- a baseline rate of exclusion or suspension in the 'at-risk' subset, which is four times higher than the equivalent for all students³⁹ namely, 40%; and
- a between-school SD in percentage exclusion and suspension of around 7%.⁴⁰

The target of 420 schools was exceeded, with 478 survey responses received. Table 13 in the 'Impact evaluation results' section illustrates MDORs at different stages of the evaluation process, with further discussion explaining the basis for their estimation.

Outcome measures

Baseline measures

The baseline measure for research questions focusing on suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained exits (I_RQ1, I_RQ2a, I_RQ2b, I_RQ2c, I_RQ3, I_RQ4, I_RQ5, and I_RQ8) was the number of suspensions and exclusions experienced by a student during their primary school education (Reception to Year 6).

For research questions focusing on absence (I_RQ6 and I_RQ7), the baseline measure was the proportion of sessions recorded as absent during the academic year 2017/2018 (both authorised and unauthorised). Absence across all primary

³⁶ Four schools were missing a Progress 8 score, so this was imputed at the mean to allow the complete sample to be retained in the analysis.

³⁷ 'Establishment fields': <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Downloads>

³⁸ Estimated using data from 2018/2019. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england>. 2018/2019 data downloaded and subset identified to look at state-funded secondary schools only.

³⁹ 'Pupil characteristics': <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england>

⁴⁰ Estimated using the variability between local authorities as school level was not available in this data set. 'Explore data': <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england>

years would usually be considered a better baseline, however, unusual absence data during Covid-19 would have complicated this approach. The Covid-affected years feature prominently in some students' baseline data (e.g. those in Year 7 in 2022/2023), but not at all in other students' baseline data (e.g. those in Year 11 in 2022/2023). Therefore, it was decided to select a single academic year before the Covid-19 pandemic where all students would be in primary education. Note that a similar approach was not implemented as a baseline for the secondary research question focusing on exclusions, suspensions, and unexplained exits outcomes (all other research questions, see previous paragraph) due to concerns about the infrequency of exclusions and suspensions at primary level, and the further impact of reducing the measure to a single year.

Primary outcome

The primary outcome measure (I_RQ1, I_RQ3, I_RQ4, I_RQ5, and I_RQ8) was a binary variable, which took the value of 1 if the student:

- had at least one exclusion or suspension recorded in the NPD during the academic year of 2022/2023 (identified using the StartDate column in the Exclusions data set, Category column can be either Permanent or Suspension⁴¹); or
- was identified as having an unexplained exit, calculated using the methodology set forth in the Education Policy Institute (EPI) report 'Unexplained pupil exits from schools' (Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019). This method used consecutive School Census data sets to identify students who moved between schools or who left their school to an unknown destination. It then sought to remove school exits, which could be reasonably explained through family reasons (e.g. change of geographic area, parents/carers in military service, a group of students with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller of Irish Heritage ethnicity leaving a school at one time), leaving only the unexplained exits.

This variable is referred to as the 'combined outcome' in the impact evaluation results.

Secondary outcomes

The secondary outcome measures were also binary variables taking the value of 1 if the student:

- had at least one suspension recorded in the NPD during the academic year of 2022/2023 (I_RQ2a);
- had at least one exclusion recorded in the NPD during the academic year of 2022/2023 (I_RQ2b);
- was identified as having an unexplained exit, calculated using the methodology set forth in the EPI report 'Unexplained pupil exits from schools' (Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019) (I_RQ2c); and
- had a proportion of 10% or more of the number of possible sessions absent (authorised or unauthorised) during the academic year of 2022/2023 (I_RQ6 and I_RQ7). This variable was defined in the Absence data set of the NPD and reflects the House of Commons Education Committee definition of persistent absence.⁴²

Statistical analysis

Primary analysis

The primary analysis used a binomial generalised linear mixed effects model (logit link) with the primary outcome as the binary response, the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) as the key explanatory variable of interest, and school as the random effect. The number of suspensions or exclusions experienced by a student during their primary school education was included as the baseline variable, with school variables used for balancing as covariates. Student-

⁴¹ In 2022/2023 exclusion data, we included rows where the value of the Category column is either Permanent or Suspension. For earlier years of data, namely, for baseline variables, we also included previous terminology for a suspension — fixed-term exclusion.

⁴² See: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41590/documents/205047/default/>

level characteristics⁴³ (gender, age/year group, ethnicity, FSM-eligibility, language, service child, SEND provision, IDACI score, young carer indicator, Key Stage 2 maths score, Key Stage 2 reading score, CPP indicator, CLA indicator, proportion of absent sessions at primary level, and experience of suspension or exclusion at primary level) were also included in the regression analysis to adjust for student-level observable characteristics. The regression model is described by:

$$\log\left(\frac{p_{ij}}{1-p_{ij}}\right) = \beta_{0j} + \beta_1 ProvisionGroup_j + \sum_{k=2}^n \beta_k X_{ij}$$

where:

- p_{ij} is the probability that student i in school j experienced the outcome;
- β_{0j} is the random intercept for school j ;
- β_1 is the coefficient of interest indicating the effect of being in school classified as having ‘embedded’ internal provision;
- $ProvisionGroup_j$ is an indicator variable for the internal provision classification of school j ;
- β_k are the coefficients of the student-level characteristics;
- X_{ij} are the characteristics of student i in school j .

Secondary analysis

The secondary outcomes of suspension, exclusion, unexplained school exit, and persistent absence were analysed using the same methodology as the primary outcome.

Estimation of effect sizes

Means for each study group are reported as proportions with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Comparisons between study groups are reported as odds ratios (ORs) with 95% CIs, and p -values for the hypothesis that the OR is significantly different to 1. The OR was transformed into an effect size using the Cox Index as presented below (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017, p. 13, cited by the EEF in EEF, 2022).

$$d_{Cox} = \frac{\left[\ln\left(\frac{p_1}{1-p_1}\right) - \ln\left(\frac{p_2}{1-p_2}\right) \right]}{1.65}$$

Where p_1 is the probability of the outcome in group 1 and p_2 is the probability of outcome in group 2.

Estimation of intracluster correlation coefficient (ICC)

The between cluster variance is reported for primary, secondary, and subgroup analysis models in Appendix B. These are calculated from the models as the variance of the random intercepts.

$$\sigma_B^2 = Var(\beta_{0j})$$

Where σ_B^2 is the between cluster variance and β_{0j} is the random intercept for school j as described in the primary analysis model equation above.

⁴³ Gender, year group, language, SEND provision, and IDACI score were taken from the autumn 2022 Census. Ethnicity, FSM eligibility (EVERFSM_6), service child, and young carer are only recorded in the spring Census so were taken from the spring 2023 Census. Key Stage 2 maths score, Key Stage 2 reading score, CPP indicator, CLA indicator come from data sets only published once a year, so these are from the 2022/2023 data sets.

The ICC is also reported for primary, secondary, and subgroup analysis models in Appendix B. ICCs were calculated using the model linearisation method described in Goldstein *et al.* 2002 and were calculated at the mean proportion within in the analytical population for each model.

$$ICC = \frac{\sigma_B^2 p_{ij}^2 [1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{ij})]^{-2}}{\sigma_B^2 p_{ij}^2 [1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{ij})]^{-2} + p_{ij}(1 - p_{ij})}$$

Where σ_B^2 is the between cluster variance, p_{ij} is the mean proportion, β_0 is the model intercept, β_1 is the provision group slope, and x_{ij} is the proportion of units belonging that provision group.

Robustness checks and sensitivity analysis

Additional analysis was conducted to check that the primary impact estimate (I_RQ1) was robust to the entropy balancing method used to create the counterfactual group, and to determine the sensitivity of the estimate to evaluator decisions regarding which schools and students to include in the analyses.

Robustness checks used propensity score methods rather than entropy balancing to create counterfactual groups. Specifically, two methods of creating propensity scores were used:

1. General Linear Model (GLM) propensity scores, which are estimated using a parametric binomial generalised linear model with a logit link (Greifer, 2025).
2. Covariate Balancing Propensity Scores (CBPS), which simultaneously model propensity scores and weights to balance treatment and control groups (Imai and Ratkovic, 2014). This approach differs to entropy balancing as the latter does not model the propensity score, while CBPS uses a parametric modelling technique likely to be familiar to researchers.

Impact estimates based on these methods were compared with that for I_RQ1, which was estimated by entropy balancing.

Four sensitivity analyses replicated the primary analysis imposing different restrictions on the schools and students included:

- excluding schools for which survey responses did not identify the academic year in which the approach was adopted;
- including only schools which reported internal provision in place since 2018/2019 or earlier;
- restricting analysis to students in the same key stage as the school's indicated approach;
- excluding schools, which have a lower than 90% probability of being classified by the LCA as belonging to one of the two groups.

These were specified due to uncertainties around some aspects of the survey responses, which were used to form the treatment contrast of interest. For example, the information about the timing of the adoption of approaches reported by schools was missing in some cases and comparatively recent to the outcome in others. There were also some cases where the survey responses indicated that the school's internal provision approach was concentrated in Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4, which might have diluted the effect estimated by the primary analysis.

Analysis in the presence of non-compliance

As per the study plan (Smith, Staunton, and Martin, 2025), student and school-level compliance was not estimated as there were no data available from which to derive compliance indicators either at the school or student level.

Missing data analysis

A key component of the primary outcome is whether a student was excluded from school in 2022/2023. This is taken from the exclusions dataset in the NPD, a collection of all recorded exclusions. Any student who does not appear in this dataset is assumed not to have been excluded. It is not possible to distinguish between never having been excluded and missing data for exclusion, experienced an exclusion of any category, and it is therefore, impossible to identify missing data for exclusions (and consequently the primary outcome). Unexplained exits were incorporated into the primary outcome measure as an attempt to identify 'exclusions', which are not officially recorded in the NPD but as specified by the study plan, no missing data analysis or imputation was carried out.

Missing data in covariates was imputed as the mean for continuous variables or the mode for categorical variables. This was only applied where missing data made up less than 5% of a covariate to limit the potential improvement in variance that more widespread imputation might cause. As high missingness in NPD data was not anticipated, causes of any covariates with greater than 5% missing values were investigated. Key Stage 2 maths and reading outcomes were planned covariates in the analysis models but both had missingness of over 40%. Investigation into where the missingness was occurring found that two year groups were missing all data for these variables due to cancellations of the Key Stage 2 exams during Covid. As a result, imputation at the mean was not applied for these covariates and instead they were removed from analysis models.

Subgroup analyses

Four subgroup analyses were undertaken (I_RQ8) to explore the impact of different approaches to internal provision on the primary outcome, for groups of students with specific characteristics. This analysis effectively replicated the primary analysis for the following subgroups of interest (listed with the NPD variable⁴⁴ used to define them):

- FSM-eligibility (EVERFSM_6_P, yes or no);
- year group (as a proxy for age; NCyearActual, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11);
- ethnicity (EthnicGroupMajor, White, Asian, Mixed, Black, Chinese, Any other ethnic group, Unclassified or missing); and
- sex (Sex,⁴⁵ female or male).

As a minimum number of students was required in each category of the subgroup variables, both for disclosure control and to allow models to run, it was necessary to combine categories 'Any other ethnic group' and 'Chinese' for the ethnicity subgroup analysis. This decision was verified with the SAB.

For each subgroup the I_RQ1 analysis was repeated to additionally include an interaction term (the subgroup variable interacted with the type of internal provision—'parallel' or 'embedded' support—to which the student's school was classified) and separately using a subsample of data for each subgroup of interest. ORs for the comparison between the types of internal provision are reported for each model, with 95% CIs and a *p*-value for the hypothesis that the OR is significantly different to 1.

Exploratory analyses

The January 2024 SAB meeting discussed the LCA-determined categories and that although there were benefits to the approach as the basis for a counterfactual impact evaluation,⁴⁶ the categories may mask important associations between individual factors and student outcomes. It was therefore, agreed that a further exploratory analysis of the impact of

⁴⁴ See: www.find-npd-data.education.gov.uk/categories

⁴⁵ Note the study plan specified gender (Gender) as being the subgroup and variable of interest.

⁴⁶ Establishing latent classes is useful for understanding typologies, as a basis for making unbiased comparisons of impact, and for drawing conclusions about effectiveness.

schools’ approaches would be undertaken, and that this would be focused on any associations between schools’ responses to survey items and the primary outcome. This analysis was a regression analysis using survey responses as predictor variables. It used data from all schools which responded to the survey (those indicating some form of ‘internal provision’ and those indicating ‘undefined provision’). The survey responses were entered into the regression without any variables to indicate the groups determined by the LCA. All survey items were entered into five separate regressions, without any additional covariates—this was to accommodate the different routes through the survey for schools with different types of provision (e.g. all respondents, respondents with Key Stage 3 in class provision).

The analysis was implemented using the R package ‘glmnet’ (Friedman *et al.*, 2025) which fits generalised linear and similar multilevel models, maximising the appropriate penalised log-likelihood using lasso. This method is appropriate when doing regression analysis with a large number of predictor variables (i.e. the set of survey items in this evaluation) as standard approaches may result in overfitting. It is also appropriate in situations where predictor variables may be highly correlated—this was assumed as survey item responses for individual schools were thought to be likely to share much in common as they described their school’s underlying approach. Inspection of the relative shrinkage of model coefficients was the basis for inferences about the relative importance of survey items in terms of their association with the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits.

IPE

IPE research methods

The IPE involved two stages of data collection: deep-dive interviews with senior leaders; and school case study visits. The research methods and the contribution of each method to answering the IPE research questions are summarised in Table 9 and described below.

Table 9: IPE research questions

IPE research methods	Data collection methods	Participants/ data sources (type, number per school)	Data analysis methods	Research questions addressed	Implementation/logic model relevance
<p>Stage 1: Deep-dive interviews in 18 schools (six schools with ‘parallel’ support, six schools with ‘embedded’ support, and six schools with ‘undefined provision’)</p> <p>Stage 2: Case studies in nine schools (a subset of the Stage 1 schools)</p> <p>(three schools with ‘parallel’ support, three schools with ‘embedded’ support, and three schools with ‘undefined provision’)</p>	Online Interviews (June 2024 – November 2024)	Senior leader with strategic responsibility for attendance/behaviour x1 Plus, interview with separate internal provision unit operational lead (where relevant) x1	Qualitative analysis with largely deductive coding of interview data	IPE_RQ1, 2, 3, 4	Activity Enabling factors Intermediate outcomes School approach Long-term goal
	Face-to-face interviews (January 2025 – March 2025)	Interviews with other school staff x2 Plus, interview with separate internal provision unit operational lead (where relevant and where these were not conducted in Stage 1) x1			IPE_RQ2, 3, 4
		Interviews with students (at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence as defined by case study schools) x4		IPE_RQ2, 3	Activity Enabling factors Intermediate outcomes
		Interviews with parents/carers of students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence interviewed (where possible) x2		IPE_RQ2, 3	Activity Enabling factors Intermediate outcomes
	Observations	Observation of internal provision environment and delivery of support to students at risk of exclusion and/or		IPE_RQ2, 3	Activity Enabling factors School approach

		persistent absence (where appropriate), see below for further details.		
Cost evaluation	Costs proforma	Costs proforma	IPE_RQ2	Enabling factors

Stage 1: Deep-dive interviews with school senior leaders: Sample

IPE schools were selected from a sample of schools that responded to the scoping phase survey.⁴⁷ Table 10 provides a breakdown of key characteristics for the 18 IPE schools. The IPE sample involved schools in the impact analysis with a greater than 90% probability of having internal provision classified as either ‘parallel’ or ‘embedded’ support according to the LCA, (with support in place prior to the 2022/2023 academic year), as well as schools classified as having ‘undefined provision’.

The IPE school selection took into account other school characteristics to ensure there was a geographical spread and a range of school types represented. Schools were not selected based on their rates of absence, suspensions, exclusions, or as examples of ‘good practice’. While efforts were made to include a diverse range of participants, there is a risk of selection bias, as those who agreed to take part may have had particularly strong opinions or more positive experiences potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives captured through the IPE.

The initial sample was made up of 27 secondary schools (nine schools from each internal provision group). This was a stratified sample to ensure representation across key variables, such as school type and geographical location. Senior leaders in the first 18 schools were contacted by email to participate between June 2024 and November 2024. Those that did not respond or declined to participate, were replaced by other schools in the sample operating the same model of provision until deep-dive interviews with all 18 schools (consisting of: six ‘parallel’ support schools; six ‘embedded’ support schools, and six ‘undefined provision’ schools) had been completed.

Table 10: The characteristic composition of the 18 IPE schools that participated in deep-dive interviews

Characteristic		No. of schools
Internal provision model	Internal provision: ‘embedded’ support	6
	Internal provision: ‘parallel’ support	6
	‘Undefined provision’	6
School type	Academy	10
	Maintained	6
	Free school	2
Region	Midlands and East of England	9
	North, Yorkshire and the Humber	4
	South	5
Rural/urban	Rural	2
	Urban	16
Proportion of FSM (quintile)	Highest 20% (more deprived intake)	3
	Second highest 20%	9
	Middle	4
	Second lowest 20%	1
	Lowest 20% (least deprived intake)	1

Source: NFER scoping phase school survey of internal provision with a sample of 478 publicly funded mainstream secondary schools in England, 2023.

Deep-dive interviews were conducted with a senior leader with responsibility for attendance and behaviour in the 18 secondary schools described above and, where possible and relevant, with a member of school staff holding operational responsibility for any separate internal provision unit. Interviewees were provided with project information and privacy notice materials in advance of the interview (see Further Appendix D and Further Appendix E). The aim of the interviews was to gain a detailed understanding of the schools’ model of provision for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, building on their responses to the scoping phase survey. Researchers used pre-prepared interview schedule.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Participants responding to the scoping phase survey were asked whether they would be willing to participate in further research—around half of the 478 respondents agreed.

⁴⁸ All data collection instruments were designed jointly by researchers at NFER and The Difference.

The interviews were originally planned to take place between June 2024 and July 2024, within the same academic year (2023/2024) when senior leaders completed the scoping study survey. Some interviewees were unavailable in June or July, so the interview period was extended to November 2024. As a result, some interviews were conducted early in the 2024/2025 academic year. In these cases, interviewees were asked to describe the support available in the previous academic year as well as any changes since that time.

The interviews took place online to facilitate ease of access to school staff and were conducted by either a researcher from NFER or The Difference. The interviews were around 45 minutes in duration. Interviews were video and audio recorded with permission from the interviewee. The recordings were used to produce interview transcripts for data analysis.

Data from the deep-dive interviews was analysed and used as a basis to select schools for follow-up case study visits. In recognition of the time involved and their contribution to the study, interviewees received an incentive payment for their involvement.⁴⁹

Stage 2: School case study visits: Sample

From the 18 IPE schools, nine case study schools (three ‘parallel’ support schools; three ‘embedded’ support schools, and three ‘undefined provision’ schools) were selected to examine their practice in more detail. This was a stratified sample to ensure representation across key variables, namely provision model, but also school type and geographical location). Like the deep-dive interviews, the case study schools were not selected as examples of ‘good practice’. They also carry a risk of selection bias—schools that volunteered to participate as case studies may hold particularly strong opinions or more positive experiences, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives.

A breakdown of key school characteristics of the nine case study schools is shown in Table 11.

Table 11: The characteristic composition of schools that participated in the case studies

Characteristic		Number of schools
Internal provision model	Internal provision: ‘embedded’ support	3
	Internal provision: ‘parallel’ support	3
	‘Undefined provision’	3
School type	Academy	5
	Maintained	3
	Free school	1
Region	Midlands and East of England	5
	North, Yorkshire and the Humber	2
	South	2
Rural/urban	Rural	1
	Urban	8
Proportion of FSM (quintile)	Highest 20% (most deprived intake)	1
	Second highest 20%	5
	Middle	1
	Second lowest 20%	1
	Lowest 20% (least deprived intake)	1

Source: NFER scoping phase school survey of internal provision with a sample of 478 publicly funded mainstream secondary schools in England, 2023.

Approach to case study visits

The school visits took place between January 2025 and March 2025. The key contact in each school (typically the senior leader interviewed in Stage 1) was provided with project information and privacy notice materials for school staff, parents/carers, and students (see Further Appendix D and Further Appendix E) and was asked to share these with those participating in the visit. A member of the research team from either NFER or The Difference visited the case study schools. Case studies involved interviews with school staff, students, and parents/carers and observations of support (where relevant and appropriate). In total, 66 interviews were conducted across the nine schools (this comprised 28 staff interviews, 26 student interviews, and 12 parent/carer interviews). Fewer interviews were conducted than planned,

⁴⁹ Interviewees received a £45 e-voucher for participating.

particularly with parents/carers and students. Further details are provided below. Interviews were conducted using pre-prepared interview schedules. Interviews were audio recorded with permission from the interviewee. The recordings were used to produce interview transcripts for analysis. In recognition of the time involved and their contribution to the study, individual interviewees and the case study schools received an incentive payment.⁵⁰

Staff interviews

Interviews took place with up to four members of staff in each case study school. School contacts were asked to nominate up to four members of staff to take part. Staff interviewees had a range of roles, but they typically included the operational/day-to-day lead of any internal provision unit in the school (where these interviews had not already taken place in Stage 1), as well as staff with a particular role supporting students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, such as heads of year and pastoral support staff. In total, there were 28 staff interviews across nine schools. The majority of staff interviews took place face-to-face on the day of the school visit. A small number took part prior to, or after the visit, by video call. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes in duration depending on the role. They focused on staff views of the school's approach to internal provision, how the support operates in practice, and their role in referral and delivery.

Student interviews

Interviews with students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion were carried out to understand their views and experiences of support provided by their school. Given the sensitivity of this topic area, all aspects of this data collection were planned carefully to ensure that students were able to speak freely to researchers, while minimising any safeguarding risks. Student interviews were conducted in line with individual school policies and procedures for engaging with students. Students were interviewed individually for up to 30 minutes, in semi-supervised environments, such as the corner of an otherwise empty classroom while a member of school staff (whom the student has agreed to being present) was engaged in activities such as lesson planning or marking, to allow visual, but not aural supervision by school staff members.

School contacts were asked to nominate up to four students who they deemed to be at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion for interview in two broad categories: those whom they considered to have benefited most and least from their experiences of school support. In total, there were 26 student interviews across eight schools. One school (a 'undefined provision' school) was not able to accommodate student interviews as part of the visit. Given the small sample size and potential vulnerability of the participating students, demographic data was not collected or reported beyond identification of being at risk of persistent absence and or exclusion in order to minimise the risk of identification and adhere to the principles of data minimisation.

Student interviews focused on their experiences of support received by the school/internal provision to reduce risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence, their understanding of why the school recommended it for them, whether they found it helpful (and if so, how), what else the school could do to support them, and their aspirations and plans for the future.

Parent/carer interviews

Interviews were held with parents/carers of students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion to gather their views on the school's support for their child. Whenever possible, the parents/carers of students who had also been interviewed were included to get multiple perspectives. School contacts were asked to speak to selected students prior to the visit to explain the purpose of the parent/carer interviews and ask for their agreement to contact their parent/carer to take part. If a student did not want their parent/carer involved, or if the parent/carer declined, other parents/carers were asked to participate. Two case study schools could not facilitate interviews with parents/carers. In a few cases parents/carers, despite having initially agreed did not attend the interview. In total interviews with 12 parents/carers were conducted across seven of the nine case study schools. In all cases, the children of participating parents/carers were also interviewed. Given the small sample size,

⁵⁰ Case study schools received a £300 payment for time spent on set-up arrangements and staff cover during the visit. Individual interviewees received: £30 per staff interview; £30 per parent/carer interview; and £30 per student interview. This was typically in the form of an e-voucher. However, in the case of student interviews researchers liaised with individual schools to identify an appropriate method that aligned with their school policies.

demographic data was not collected or reported for parents/carers participating in this study in order to minimise the risk of identification and adhere to the principles of data minimisation.

Parent/carer interviews took place at a date and time that was most convenient for them. In most cases, their preference was for the interview to take place face-to-face on the day of the school visit. A small number took part at a later date by phone/video call. The interviews lasted up to 30 minutes in duration and focused on their experiences of communication and partnership with the school, their views on the support being provided to their child and what difference the support had made.

Observation

Observations took place in all nine case study schools. They enabled the research to gain further understanding of how the support operated in practice across the different case study schools. Researchers visiting the case study schools undertook observations where appropriate, this included visiting separate internal provision facilities (where these were in place) and in some cases observing in-class support where this was provided. The observations also provided opportunities for the researcher to build rapport with students and staff prior to carrying out interviews. An instrument was designed for making observation notes, it included sections for key contextual information and predetermined categories linked to the research questions.

Analysis

All interviews were recorded (with participant agreement), transcribed and imported into MaxQDA (qualitative data analysis software). A selection of interview transcripts was reviewed by the project leader for rigour and to ensure quality and consistency of approach across the research team. A deductive, top-level coding frame was developed based on the research questions and researchers coded the data from each source inductively within that frame. There was a process for discussing coding queries among the research team and quality assurance checks of data coding to ensure a consistent approach. Common themes, reflecting the research questions, were analysed at the school level, allowing exploration of particular 'school cases' and the evolution of a particular practice approach, as well as looking at the 'whole picture', using triangulation to compare perspectives of different participant groups (e.g. school staff, parents/carers, and students).

Observation notes were used to triangulate and enrich interview findings by providing deeper contextual understanding of the themes that emerged from the interviews.

As noted above, the first unit of analysis was the school, but the extent of consistency between schools using the same approach was also investigated. An analysis of activities across approaches enabled the evaluation to identify any themes that were common or distinctive to certain approaches to test the causal mechanisms of the ToCs.

To support the analysis of the groups to which schools were classified by the LCA, short school summary templates were developed to capture the key practices within each school. These templates supported the comparison of the intended characteristics of the assigned groups and the implementation in practice using interview findings. This method facilitated the identification of patterns highlighting areas of alignment or divergence from the model for each school.

This analytic design enabled the research team to explore the qualitative data in depth, while maintaining an audit trail to ensure rigour of the analytical process.

Costs

Information on the school costs of providing support to students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion are likely to be useful to support understanding and decision-making around schools' internal provision. However, it was challenging for case study schools to provide detailed cost information about a 'school choice' rather than a manualised intervention, especially when support is rooted in their 'usual' provision. A cost proforma was devised to capture the main cost drivers of different aspects of provision (e.g. staff costs and specific resources). The aim was to provide an understanding of the type and range of key costs involved for schools—it was not intended to determine the cost per student per year.

The costs proforma was shared electronically with schools in advance of the case study visits. The reason for doing so was to allow time for schools to prepare the information and, if necessary, so they could share the form with the school bursar or business manager to aid completion.

Originally, cost proformas were only planned for use in case study schools where there was some form of internal provision (i.e. the six case study schools where their survey responses suggested they had either 'embedded' support or 'parallel' support). However, after the deep-dive interviews had taken place, the research team decided to share the cost proforma with all nine case study schools to support further understanding of the provision described by senior leaders in schools that had been categorised as having 'undefined provision'.

Cost proformas were completed by seven case study schools in total.⁵¹ Three proformas were received from the schools in the 'parallel' support group, two from schools in the 'embedded' support group (one only partially complete), and two from schools in the 'undefined provision' group. Five of the seven responding case study schools had some form of separate unit to support students at risk of permanent exclusion and/or persistent absence. In some case study schools, the proformas were discussed during the visit, others were completed and returned electronically after the visit had taken place.

When analysing cost proformas from case study schools, school context and type of internal provision reported by the school were noted to see whether any elements of costs appeared more common in some schools or types of provision compared to others. Contextual factors such as the proportion of students considered to be at risk of permanent exclusion or persistent absence were considered although any patterns identified based on these characteristics must be considered very tentatively due to the low numbers of schools involved. The costs reported in the 'Cost evaluation results' section are for all case study schools (that completed a proforma) except where stated. In addition, costs are presented as time costs where they concern staff employed by the school.

Where the cost and resourcing of internal provision was mentioned in qualitative interviews with school staff in any of the IPE schools, this data was used to provide additional context to the costs reported in the proformas.

⁵¹ Time and capacity constraints in the other two case study schools meant they were unable to complete the cost proformas.

Timeline

Table 12: Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible / leading
Scoping phase		
October 2022	Project agreed	NFER/The Difference, the EEF, and the YEF
October 2022 – November 2022	Project start up, privacy notices, and information sheets	NFER/The Difference
November 2022 – December 2022	Expert interviews	NFER/The Difference
February 2023 – March 2023	School case studies	NFER/The Difference
September 2023 – October 2023	School survey	NFER
January 2024 – March 2024	SAB meeting, impact evaluation feasibility review and application process	NFER/The Difference
Impact evaluation		
May 2024	Project agreed	NFER/The Difference, the EEF and the YEF
June 2024	Project start up SAB meeting—study design Sample schools to participate in deep-dive interviews Develop interview schedules Set-up and conduct 18 deep-dive interviews	NFER/The Difference
July 2024 – August 2024	Finalise study plan and submit NPD request Continue to set-up and conduct 18 deep-dive interviews Processing and analysis of interview data	NFER/The Difference
September 2024 – December 2024	Complete remaining deep-dive interviews Processing and analysis of interview data Sample nine case study schools	NFER/The Difference
January 2025 – March 2025	School case study visits Case study data processing and analysis NPD matching Generate outcome measures and carry out matching iterations	NFER/The Difference
April 2025 – September 2025	Primary and secondary outcome models Impact reporting IPE analysis and reporting Integration of IPE and impact evaluation findings SAB meeting—end of project findings	NFER/The Difference
October 2025 – Spring 2026	Submit final School Choices evaluation report Report published	NFER/The Difference

Impact evaluation results

Participant flow including losses and exclusions

Figure 3: Participant flow diagram (two treatment contrasts)

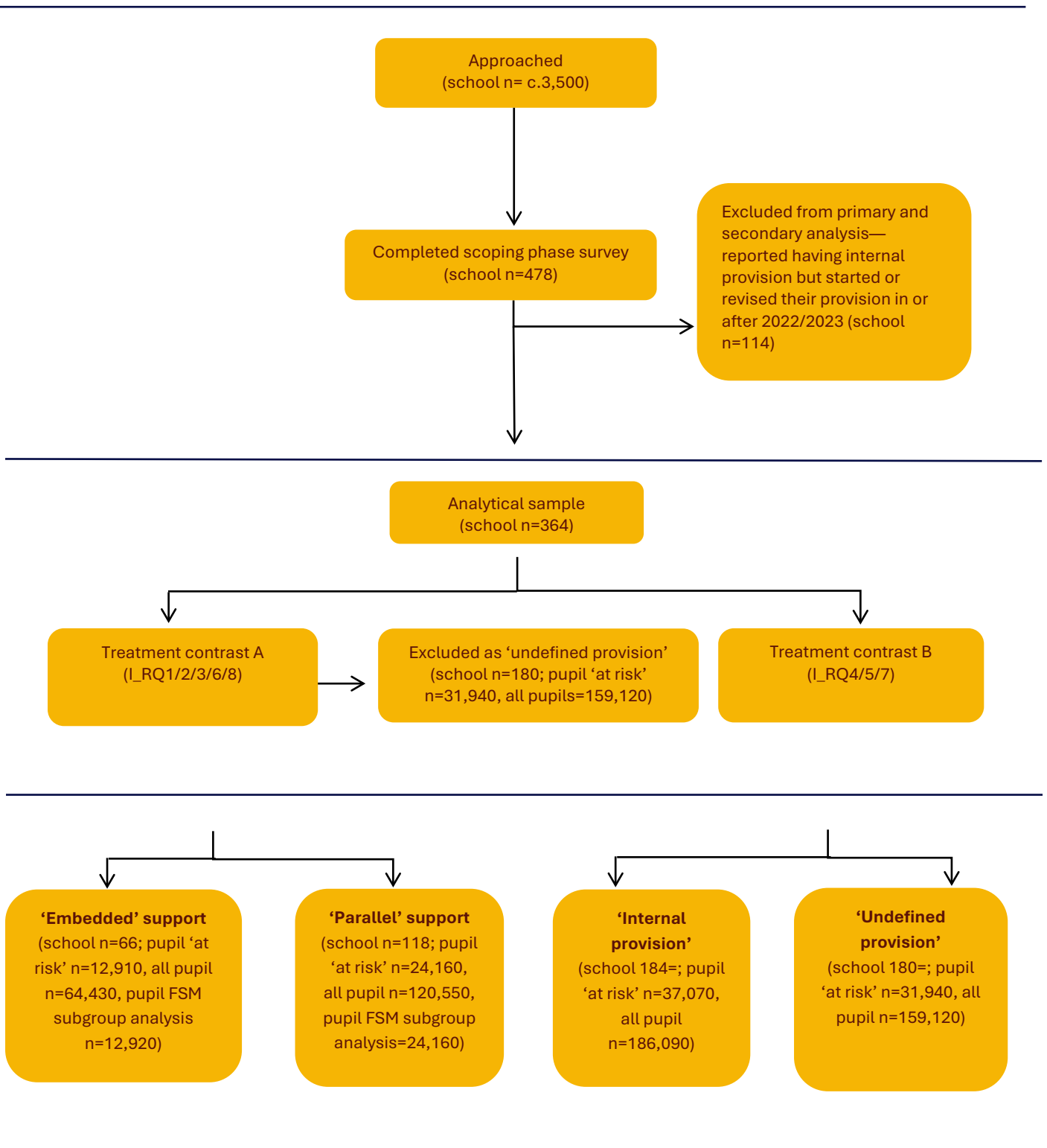


Table 13: MDORs and Minimum Detectable Cox Indexes (MDCIs) at different stages of the evaluation

		Study plan (no unmatched schools; treatment contrast A)		Study plan (approx. 10% unmatched schools; treatment contrast A) ^a	Primary analysis (treatment contrast A)	Secondary analysis (treatment contrast B)	Secondary analysis (treatment contrast A)
		Overall	FSM ^b	Overall	Overall	Overall	FSM
MDOR		1.09	1.10	1.11	1.26	1.23	1.28
Minimum Detectable Cox Index (MDCI)		0.052	0.058	0.063	0.140	0.125	0.150
ICCs ^c	Level 2 (school)	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.105	0.130	0.105
Between-school variance		0.005	0.005	0.005	0.275	0.358	0.275
Alpha		0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Power		0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
One-sided or two-sided?		Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided	Two-sided
Average cluster size (per secondary school)		1000	173	1000	-	-	146
Average cluster size (per secondary school, 'at-risk' students)		200	173	200	201	190	-
Baseline rate of exclusion or suspension - 'at-risk' comparison group ('Parallel' support / 'undefined provision')		40%	40%	40%	19.3%	20.0%	19.3%
No. of schools	'Embedded' support/ 'Internal provision'	66	66	59	66	184	66
	'Parallel' support/ 'Undefined provision'	118	118	106	118	180	118
	Total	184	184	165	184	364	184
No. of students	'Embedded' support/ 'Internal provision'	13,200	11,418	11,800	12,910	37,070	9,060
	'Parallel' support/ 'Undefined provision'	23,600	20,414	21,200	24,160	31,940	17,810
	Total	36,800	31,832	33,000	37,070	69,010	26,870

^a Reasons for schools being unmatched include them being not in the area of common support, and no appropriate match being identified for a school in the matching process itself.

^b Around 17.3% FSM-eligible (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>).

^c Between-school variance is used in the sample size methodology rather than ICC. ICC is dependent on the value of the outcome variable and has been calculated for completeness using the mean outcome proportion for each model.

Table 13 includes estimates of MDORs and their equivalent MDCIs at different stages of the evaluation. The Cox Index is an effect size for dichotomous outcomes, which aims to recreate the Hedges' *g* effect size (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017, p. 13, cited by the EEF in EEF, 2022).

The target number of schools responding to surveys was exceeded but restricting primary analysis to only those schools which were offering some form of internal provision and did not indicate starting or making significant changes to provision in 2022/2023 or later reduced the sample to 184 schools. This number was known when the study plan (Smith, Staunton, and Martin, 2025) was published, and the MDORs specified at study plan stage on this basis were 1.09 (MDCI = 0.05) (for no unmatched schools) and 1.11 (MDCI = 0.06) (the latter under the assumption that 10% of the schools would be unmatched due to the requirement for common support before matching schools). As the impact evaluation ultimately used entropy balancing rather than matching (and in a change to the study plan did not implement common support as an initial step), the MDOR estimates for the primary and secondary analysis do not include an assumed proportion of unmatched schools.

An ICC was not specified in the study plan power calculations table because it is a non-standard metric for multilevel logistic models and not used in sample size calculations. As described in the 'Sample size' section of this report, the between-school SD of the percentage of exclusion and suspension was estimated to be 7%. No direct source for the between-school variance could be found so this was estimated using between-local authority data. However, this proved to be an underestimation, and the between-school variances at the analysis stage were considerably larger than those previously assumed (see Table 13); hence the MDOR for the primary analysis was 1.26 (MDCI = 0.14).⁵² The study was underpowered to detect an effect of the magnitude assumed by the design stage sample size calculations (MDOR = 1.09, MDCI = 0.05); the statistical power achievable with the analysis sample was less than estimated at the design stage.

Attrition

A likely source of attrition in a counterfactual impact evaluation, which uses matching (of which balancing by weighting is a variant) may be the implementation of a common support restriction. In this evaluation, however, the balanced school groups were not limited to those schools with common support. We lost no schools due to missing data in the matching variables, by imputing the mean Progress 8 score for the four schools missing this data. Another source may be the loss of participants to follow-up subsequent to a 'quasi-randomisation date' (a date where the sample is clearly established and from which attrition is measured). This study was retrospective; outcomes were measured from a period of time which preceded the date on which comparison groups were formed and balancing was implemented.

As neither of these sources of attrition were relevant to this study, and no other pupil-level attrition was observed by the research team, this report does not characterise nor quantify attrition. Schools were excluded from the primary and secondary analysis due to reporting having internal provision but started or revised their provision in or after 2022/2023, but these were excluded prior to the quasi-randomisation achieved through LCA classification and balancing the groups.

Pupil and school characteristics

Tables 14 (in the 'Outcomes and analysis' section) describes the characteristics of schools and pupils included in the evaluation, compared with the national population, before and after entropy balancing to weight the groups. *Unweighted* percentages and means are the basis for baseline comparisons between schools and pupils included in the evaluation, and those nationally.

⁵² For context, if we assume the comparison group had an exclusion/suspension/unexplained exit rate of 10%, an OR of 1.09 (design stage) would imply an intervention group rate of 9.25%. An OR of 1.26 (primary analysis) would imply an intervention group rate at 8.1%. In this example the minimal detectable difference of the primary analysis is 1.9%, larger than that (0.75%) assumed at the design stage. Therefore, the actual effect of the intervention would need to be larger than anticipated for the trial to be sufficiently powered.

Schools reporting any type of internal provision were slightly more likely to be based in the East Midlands, or South-East compared with the national population, but slightly less likely to be based in London, the North-West, or the West Midlands. A smaller proportion of schools reporting any type of internal provision were classified as the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) rating ‘requires improvement’. Schools reporting any type of internal provision were also slightly larger than the national average (1,175 pupils compared with 1,064), but pupil to qualified teacher ratios were similar across both. Overall schools reporting any type of internal provision appeared to be representative of the national population. This was also the case for the characteristics of pupils in these schools, with a range of pupil-level indicators indicating similar proportions.

Schools in the ‘parallel’ support group were more likely to be located in the East Midlands or London, but less likely to be in the East of England or Yorkshire and the Humber. Schools in the ‘embedded’ support group were slightly more likely to be Ofsted rated as ‘outstanding’, to have marginally higher Progress 8 scores, a higher proportion of female students, a slightly lower proportion of students classified as ‘everFSM’, and a higher proportion of students with language group ‘English’. These differences were however, of a relatively small magnitude, and schools in both groups were similar across a range of other characteristics. Although the LCA identified sufficiently distinct groups based on survey data, it does however, appear that underlying school and pupil characteristics included in Table 14 suggest a high degree of similarity across the groups (potentially contributing factors, which would undermine any apparent treatment contrast).

Outcomes and analysis

Preliminary analysis

The balance achieved by entropy balancing (a method of balancing the two groups of schools being compared—see ‘Impact evaluation phase method’ section for details) at the school level is also illustrated by Table 14, by comparing the post-balancing *weighted* values across groups. Across the two groups of internal provision support model (‘parallel’ and ‘embedded’ support), school-level characteristics used as balancing variables (e.g. region, historic [2017/2018] exclusion and suspension, mean teacher pay, Progress 8, and pupil to qualified teacher ratio) were generally well balanced following weighting, and adequate balance was also achieved across student-level characteristics despite these not being included in the entropy balancing process. However, school-level characteristics not used as balancing variables (e.g. phase, Ofsted rating⁵³), were not as well balanced across the groups. For example, the proportion of schools Ofsted rated ‘outstanding’ differs by 1.9% across the two groups. The magnitude of this difference is not however so large as to warrant concern, given the number and breadth of school-level characteristics successfully balanced. Table 14 also shows a similar pattern of findings when comparing the balance achieved between the ‘internal provision’ and ‘undefined provision’ groups.

The evaluation team concluded that the balance achieved by entropy balancing for both comparisons was adequate, in terms of the specific balancing variables, and also other school and pupil characteristics. In order to protect against identification of individual schools, statistical disclosure control has been applied in the characteristic tables. Where the number of schools in a category is less than or equal to three, the true count has been censored and a corresponding high count has been censored to avoid secondary disclosure through total number of schools.

⁵³ See ‘Selection mechanism, comparison group, and identification assumptions’.

Table 14: Characteristics of the groups compared to the national population (before and after entropy balancing to weight the groups - unweighted and weighted figures, respectively)

	School level (categorical)	National-level mean	'Parallel' support			'Embedded' support			'Undefined provision'			Any 'internal provision'		
			n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %	n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %	n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %	n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Phase	All-through	166 (4.7%)	5/118 (0)	4.2%	3.8%	≤3/66 (0)	≤4.5%	<=4.5%	6/180 (0)	3.3%	4.2%	8/184 (0)	4.3%	4.2%
	Middle deemed secondary	94 (2.6%)	≤3/118 (0)	≤2.5%	<=2.5%	≤3/66 (0)	≤4.5%	<=4.5%	9/180 (0)	5%	4.3%	4/184 (0)	2.2%	2.6%
	Secondary	3297 (92.7%)	>110/118 (0)	>93.2%	>93.6%	>60/66 (0)	>91.0%	>90.9%	165/180 (0)	91.7%	91.5%	172/184 (0)	93.5%	93.1%
Region	East Midlands	302 (8.5%)	17/118 (0)	14.4%	13.1%	7/66 (0)	10.6%	13%	25/180 (0)	13.9%	13.4%	24/184 (0)	13%	13.5%
	East of England	403 (11.3%)	12/118 (0)	10.2%	11.4%	9/66 (0)	13.6%	11.4%	31/180 (0)	17.2%	14.3%	21/184 (0)	11.4%	14.3%
	London	522 (14.7%)	17/118 (0)	14.4%	11.4%	4/66 (0)	6.1%	11.4%	15/180 (0)	8.3%	9.9%	21/184 (0)	11.4%	9.9%
	North-East	178 (5%)	5/118 (0)	4.2%	3.8%	≤3/66 (0)	≤4.5%	3.8%	9/180 (0)	5%	4.4%	7/184 (0)	3.8%	4.4%
	North-West	494 (13.9%)	13/118 (0)	11.0%	11.4%	8/66 (0)	12.1%	11.4%	25/180 (0)	13.9%	12.6%	21/184 (0)	11.4%	12.7%
	South-East	544 (15.3%)	23/118 (0)	19.5%	19.6%	>12/66 (0)	>18.2%	19.5%	24/180 (0)	13.3%	16.5%	36/184 (0)	19.6%	16.5%
	South-West	351 (9.9%)	11/118 (0)	9.3%	9.7%	7/66 (0)	10.6%	9.8%	20/180 (0)	11.1%	10.4%	18/184 (0)	9.8%	10.4%
	West Midlands	433 (12.2%)	12/118 (0)	10.2%	9.7%	6/66 (0)	9.1%	9.8%	22/180 (0)	12.2%	11%	18/184 (0)	9.8%	11%
	Yorkshire and the Humber	330 (9.3%)	8/118 (0)	6.8%	9.7%	10/66 (0)	15.2%	9.8%	9/180 (0)	5%	7.4%	18/184 (0)	9.8%	7.4%
Ofsted	Outstanding	486 (13.7%)	15/118 (0)	12.7%	12%	10/66 (0)	15.2%	13.9%	27/180 (0)	15%	3.5%	25/184 (0)	13.6%	<=1.6%

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	Good	2343 (65.9%)	>84/118 (0)	>71.2%	>72%	>42/66 (0)	>63.6%	>65.5%	>118/180 (0)	>65.6%	>64.5%	>135/184 (0)	>73.4%	>72.6%
	Requires improvement	427 (12%)	10/118 (0)	8.5%	8.3%	5/66 (0)	7.6%	7%	22/180 (0)	12.2%	13.4%	15/184 (0)	8.2%	7.5%
	Serious weaknesses	43 (1.2%)	≤3/118 (0)	≤2.5%	<=2.5%	≤3/66 (0)	≤4.5%	<=4.5%	<=3/180 (0)	<=1.7%	<=1.7%	<=3/184 (0)	<=1.6%	<=1.6%
	Special measures	39 (1.1%)	≤3/118 (0)	≤2.5%	<=2.5%	≤3/66 (0)	≤4.5%	<=4.5%	4/180 (0)	2.2%	2.2%	<=3/184 (0)	<=1.6%	<=1.6%
	Missing	219 (6.2%)	≤3/118 (0)	≤2.5%	<=2.5%	≤3/66 (0)	≤4.5%	<=4.5%	6/180 (0)	3.3%	3.5%	<=3/184 (0)	<=1.6%	<=1.6%
	School level (continuous)		n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)	n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)	n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)	n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)
	No. of pupils	1064.3 (406.8)	118/118 (0)	1202.7 (395.9)	1202.2 (479.7)	66/66 (0)	1124.8 (368.6)	1132.8 (722.1)	180/180 (0)	1069.3 (387)	1061.3 (495.6)	184/184 (0)	1174.8 (387.1)	1192.8 (532.5)
	Mean teacher pay	44394.9 (3608.9)	118/118 (0)	44619 (3392.6)	44258.6 (8786.8)	66/66 (0)	43475.8 (2883.6)	44090.3 (24018.8)	180/180 (0)	44292.4 (4007.7)	44275.4 (14263.9)	184/184 (0)	44208.9 (3258)	44216.4 (11570)
	Pupil to qualified teacher ratio	17.4 (2.6)	118/118 (0)	17.2 (1.8)	17.2 (4.5)	66/66 (0)	17.3 (2.2)	17.2 (8.9)	180/180 (0)	17.5 (2.1)	17.4 (5.3)	184/184 (0)	17.2 (1.9)	17.4 (5.2)
	Progress 8	-0.02 (0.52)	118/118 (0)	-0.01 (0.46)	0.00 (0.46)	66/66 (0)	0.03 (0.56)	0.00 (0.62)	180/180 (0)	0.07 (0.49)	0.03 (0.54)	184/184 (0)	0 (0.5)	0.03 (0.49)
	Proportion excluded or suspended in 2017/2018	0.005 (0.005)	118/118 (0)	0.005 (0.005)	0.006 (0.006)	66/66 (0)	0.006 (0.005)	0.006 (0.006)	180/180 (0)	0.005 (0.005)	0.005 (0.007)	184/184 (0)	0.006 (0.005)	0.005 (0.004)
	Pupil level (categorical)		n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %	n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %	n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %	n/N (missing)	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Gender	Female	1558870 (48.8%)	58,210/120,550 (0)	48.3%	48.3%	32,590/64,430 (0)	50.6%	51.1%	81,430/159,290 (0)	51.1%	50.8%	90,790/184,980 (0)	49.1%	49.2%
	Male	1637920 (51.2%)	62,340/120,550 (0)	51.7%	51.7%	31,840/64,430 (0)	49.4%	48.9%	77,860/159,290 (0)	48.9%	49.2%	94,190/184,980 (0)	50.9%	50.8%
Language group	English	2618840 (81.9%)	97,670/120,550 (0)	81%	82.6%	55,300/64,430 (0)	85.8%	83.6%	132,910/159,300 (0)	83.4%	82.4%	152,970/184,980 (0)	82.7%	83.6%
	Other or Unclassified	577950 (18.1%)	22,880/120,550 (0)	19%	17.4%	9,130/64,430 (0)	14.2%	16.4%	26,390/159,300 (0)	16.6%	17.6%	32,010/184,980 (0)	17.3%	16.4%

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Service child	No or Refused or Unknown	3171610 (99.2%)	119,370/120,550 (0)	99%	98.9%	64,040/64,430 (0)	99.4%	99.5%	157,900/159,290 (0)	99.1%	99.2%	183,410/184,980 (0)	99.2%	99.1%
	Yes	25180 (0.8%)	1,180/120,550 (0)	1%	1.1%	390/64,430 (0)	0.6%	0.5%	1,390/159,290 (0)	0.9%	0.8%	1,570/184,980 (0)	0.8%	0.9%
Year group	Year 7	659460 (20.6%)	25,190/120,550 (0)	20.9%	21%	13,580/64,440 (0)	21.1%	21%	32,920/159,290 (0)	20.7%	20.7%	38,770/184,980 (0)	21%	21%
	Year 8	647970 (20.3%)	24,780/120,550 (0)	20.6%	20.5%	13,010/64,440 (0)	20.2%	19.8%	32,530/159,290 (0)	20.4%	20.4%	37,780/184,980 (0)	20.4%	20.4%
	Year 9	636940 (19.9%)	23,930/120,550 (0)	19.9%	19.8%	12,600/64,440 (0)	19.6%	19.1%	31,780/159,290 (0)	2%	20%	36,530/184,980 (0)	19.7%	19.7%
	Year 10	639800 (20%)	23,750/120,550 (0)	19.7%	19.7%	12,670/64,440 (0)	19.7%	19.9%	31,900/159,290 (0)	2%	20%	36,420/184,980 (0)	19.7%	19.7%
	Year 11	612610 (19.2%)	22,900/120,550 (0)	19%	19%	12,580/64,440 (0)	19.5%	20.1%	30,160/159,290 (0)	18.9%	18.9%	35,480/184,980 (0)	19.2%	19.2%
SEND provision	No SEND	2625100 (82.1%)	101,650/120,550 (0)	84.3%	83.9%	53,490/64,430 (0)	83%	83.6%	135,850/159,290 (0)	85.3%	84.9%	155,140/184,980 (0)	83.9%	84.3%
	SEND support	416190 (13%)	15,820/120,550 (0)	13.1%	13.5%	9,200/64,430 (0)	14.3%	13.7%	19,530/159,290 (0)	12.3%	12.6%	25,020/184,980 (0)	13.5%	13.1%
	SEND support with an EHCP	155500 (4.9%)	3,080/120,550 (0)	2.6%	2.6%	1,740/64,430 (0)	2.7%	2.7%	3,910/159,290 (0)	2.5%	2.5%	4,820/184,980 (0)	2.6%	2.6%
Ethnic group	Any other Ethnic Group or Chinese	88000 (2.8%)	3,130/120,540 (0)	2.6%	2.3%	1,600/64,430 (0)	2.5%	3.1%	3,810/159,280 (0)	2.4%	2.5%	4,730/184,970 (0)	2.6%	2.4%
	Asian	359360 (11.2%)	14,370/120,540 (0)	11.9%	10.9%	5,740/64,430 (0)	8.9%	10.4%	17,110/159,280 (0)	10.7%	11%	20,110/184,970 (0)	10.9%	10.7%
	Black	188040 (5.9%)	6,090/120,540 (0)	5.1%	4.5%	2,410/64,430 (0)	3.7%	4.6%	7,180/159,280 (0)	4.5%	5.2%	8,500/184,970 (0)	4.6%	4.2%
	Mixed	206130 (6.4%)	7,480/120,540 (0)	6.2%	6%	3,730/64,430 (0)	5.8%	6.4%	9,710/159,280 (0)	6.1%	6.2%	11,210/184,970 (0)	6.1%	5.9%
	Unclassified or Missing	83350 (2.6%)	2,920/120,540 (0)	2.4%	2.4%	1,370/64,430 (0)	2.1%	2.2%	3,550/159,280 (0)	2.2%	2.3%	4,290/184,970 (0)	2.3%	2.3%
	White	2271920 (71.1%)	86,550/120,540 (0)	71.8%	74%	49,580/64,430 (0)	77%	73.3%	117,920/159,280 (0)	74%	72.8%	136,130/184,970 (0)	73.6%	74.5%

EVERFSM	No or Missing	2310710 (72.3%)	87,270/120,550 (0)	72.4%	73.2%	47,950/64,430 (0)	74.4%	73.2%	124,230/159,300 (0)	78%	75.9%	135,210/184,970 (0)	73.1%	75.2%
	Yes	886080 (27.7%)	33,280/120,550 (0)	27.6%	26.8%	16,480/64,430 (0)	25.6%	26.8%	35,070/159,300 (0)	22%	24.1%	49,760/184,970 (0)	26.9%	24.8%
Young carer	No or Missing	3175500 (99.3%)	119,650/120,550 (0)	99.3%	99.2%	64,050/64,430 (0)	99.4%	99.4%	158,170/159,290 (0)	99.3%	99.3%	183,690/184,980 (0)	99.3%	99.3%
	Identified as young carer	21290 (0.7%)	900/120,550 (0)	0.7%	0.8%	380/64,430 (0)	0.6%	0.6%	1,120/159,290 (0)	0.7%	0.7%	1,290/184,980 (0)	0.7%	0.7%
	Pupil level (continuous)		n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)	n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)	n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)	n/N (missing)	Unweighted mean (SD)	Weighted mean (SD)
	IDACl score	0.18 (0.12)	120,550/120,550 (0)	0.17 (0.12)	0.17 (0.13)	64,430/64,430 (0)	0.17 (0.13)	0.17 (0.16)	159,290/159,290 (0)	0.15 (0.11)	0.16 (0.16)	184,980/184,980 (0)	0.17 (0.12)	0.16 (0.11)
	CPP indicator	0.01 (0.11)	120,550/120,550 (0)	0.01 (0.1)	0.01 (0.1)	64,430/64,430 (0)	0.01 (0.11)	0.01 (0.12)	159,290/159,290 (0)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.11)	184,980/184,980 (0)	0.01 (0.11)	0.01 (0.1)
	CLA indicator	0.01 (0.1)	120,550/120,550 (0)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)	64,430/64,430 (0)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.11)	159,290/159,290 (0)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)	184,980/184,980 (0)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)

Primary analysis

Primary analysis estimated the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the combined outcome, to answer the research question:

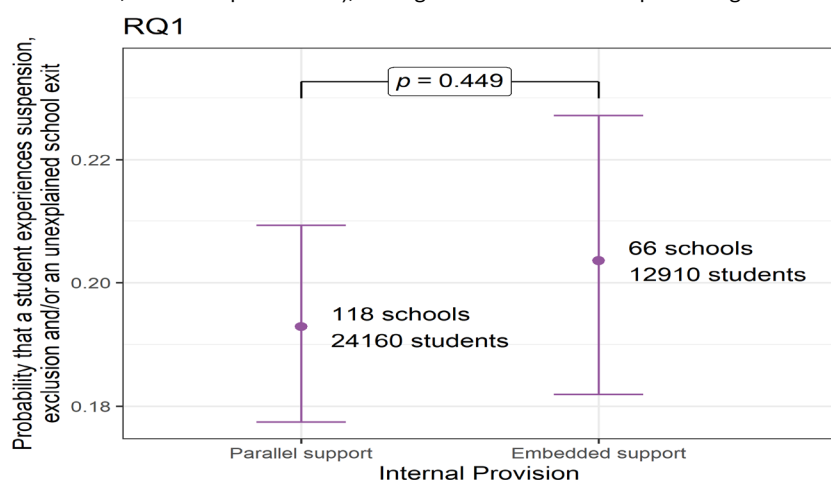
I_RQ1: What is the impact of the type of internal provision⁵⁴ ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among secondary school students at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits?

Table 15 shows the impact for each type of internal provision, expressed as group adjusted means, an OR, and as a Cox Index effect size. The adjusted mean probability of 'at-risk' students experiencing the combined outcome (suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) was 0.193 (CI: 0.177, 0.209) in schools classified as providing 'parallel' support and 0.204 (CI: 0.182, 0.227) in schools classified as providing 'embedded' support. The OR for this analysis was 1.070 (CI: 0.898, 1.274), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.018 (CI: -0.028, 0.064). Both the OR and the effect size were not declared to be a statistically significant difference between the different types of internal provision, as $p=0.449$, and the CIs cross 1 and 0, respectively. Therefore, this analysis was unable to determine whether or not either type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) had a differential impact on the combined outcome (probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) among the 'at-risk' group of students.

Table 15: Primary analysis, I_RQ1; the impact of the type of internal provision on the primary outcome (the likelihood of experiencing a suspension, an exclusion, or an unexplained exit), among students 'at risk' of experiencing the outcome

Outcome	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits	24,160	0.193 (0.177, 0.209)	12,910	0.204 (0.182, 0.227)	37,070	1.070 (0.898, 1.274)	0.018 (-0.028, 0.064)	0.449

Figure 4: Primary analysis, I_RQ1: the impact of the type of internal provision on the primary outcome (the likelihood of experiencing a suspension, an exclusion, or an unexplained exit), among students 'at risk' of experiencing the outcome



⁵⁴ Originally labelled in the study plan as 'internal AP', this term has been revised as definitions of internal AP vary across government guidance, research and individual interpretation and are used inconsistently. The broader term 'internal provision' is used throughout this report to encompass the widest range of school support for pupils at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion.

Further analysis was undertaken to check whether the results of the primary analysis were robust to the choice of entropy balancing as a method of creating equivalent groups. Table 16 below shows estimates for two alternate methods: using GLM propensity scores; and CBPS. Both methods gave similar results to those of the primary analysis, in terms of the adjusted mean probabilities of ‘at-risk’ students experiencing the combined outcome (suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) and the ORs and associated CIs. Both OR and Cox Index CIs included 1 and 0, respectively, and therefore, the effect sizes were not declared to be statistically significant differences between the types of internal provision. Therefore, these robustness checks were unable to determine whether or not either type of internal provision (‘embedded’ or ‘parallel’ support) had a differential impact on the combined outcome (probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) among the ‘at-risk’ group of students.

Table 16: Robustness checks (I_RQ1)

Robustness check	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	‘Parallel’ support		‘Embedded’ support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)					
GLM propensity score	24,160	0.193 (0.177, 0.210)	12,910	0.206 (0.183, 0.231)	37,070	1.070 (0.898, 1.274)	0.021 (-0.027, 0.070)	0.392
CBPS	24,160	0.193 (0.177, 0.210)	12,910	0.206 (0.183, 0.231)	37,070	1.084 (0.901, 1.303)	0.021 (-0.028, 0.071)	0.395

Further analysis was undertaken to check whether the results of the primary analysis were sensitive to choices about which schools to include in the primary analysis. The primary analysis was therefore, repeated a further four times, implementing a different sensitivity analysis each time:

- excluding schools for which survey responses did not identify the academic year in which the approach was adopted;
- including only schools which reported internal provision in place since 2018/2019 or earlier;
- restricting analysis to students in the same key stage as the school’s indicated approach; and
- excluding schools which have a lower than 90% probability of being classified by the LCA as belonging to one of the two groups.

Table 17 below shows estimates for these alternate analyses. All gave similar results to those of the primary analysis, both in terms of the direction of the effects and their magnitude, and that they are not statistically significant (the CIs for the OR and Cox Index cross 1 and 0, respectively). The first sensitivity analysis (which excluded schools for which there was uncertainty about the timing of their adoption of their approach) was associated with a p-value (0.087), much closer to being statistically significant than that of the primary analysis. Despite the larger sample size of the primary analysis, its inclusion of ‘uncertain timing’ schools may have contributed to its impact estimates being associated with larger p-values. One explanation for this might be that including ‘uncertain timing’ schools in the primary analysis may have in fact included schools whose approach was implemented in an academic year following that in which the outcomes of interest were measured (hence, resulting in a smaller, and statistically non-significant) effect.

Table 17: Sensitivity analysis (I_RQ1)

Sensitivity analysis	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Academic year of adoption of approach to internal provision missing from survey response	16,150	0.184 (0.165, 0.204)	10,240	0.214 (0.187, 0.242)	26,390	1.205 (0.973, 1.491)	0.049 (-0.007, 0.105)	0.087
Including only those schools which had internal provision in place from 2018/2019 or earlier	15,380	0.192 (0.174, 0.210)	5,950	0.194 (0.167, 0.224)	21,330	1.012 (0.814, 1.259)	0.003 (-0.054, 0.061)	0.912
Only including pupils in same key stage as school's indicated approach	18,650	0.193 (0.176, 0.210)	7,300	0.205 (0.178, 0.235)	25,950	1.080 (0.880, 1.327)	0.020 (-0.034, 0.075)	0.461
Excluding schools with <90% probability of being classified as belonging to one of the two groups	21,060	0.194 (0.176, 0.212)	9,500	0.209 (0.182, 0.239)	30,560	1.101 (0.895, 1.354)	0.025 (-0.029, 0.080)	0.363

In summary, the primary analysis was robust to checks which implemented alternate design choices. No statistically significant effects were observed; there is uncertainty around the point estimate (OR), meaning that based on this analysis it is not possible to determine whether or not either of the types of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) had a differential impact on the combined outcome among the 'at-risk' group of students.

Secondary analysis

Eight secondary analyses were carried out to estimate impacts on separate (rather than combined) outcomes, plus an additional persistent absence outcome. These analyses focused on both the 'at-risk' group and separately on all students. They addressed two different contrasts:

1. The type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) to which schools had been classified.
2. Schools with any type of 'internal provision' compared with schools with 'undefined provision'.

The impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on student outcomes

Five analyses estimated impacts by directly comparing the two different types of internal provision to which schools were classified. I_RQ2a-c focused on separate aspects of the combined outcome used in the primary analysis, among students at risk of these:

- What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the probability of...
 - suspension among secondary school students at risk of suspension? (I_RQ2a)
 - exclusion among secondary school students at risk of exclusion? (I_RQ2b)
 - unexplained exits among secondary school students at risk of unexplained exits? (I_RQ2c).

As such each research question I_RQ2a-c used different 'at-risk' groups to those defined for I_RQ1 (see 'Impact evaluation phase methods' section). Table 18 and Figures 5 to 7 show that no statistically significant impacts were found for the separate outcomes, and hence this analysis was unable to determine whether or not either of the types of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) had a differential impact on them among students at risk of the same. The adjusted mean probability of **suspension** for 'at-risk' students was 0.003 (CI: 0.003, 0.004) in schools classified as providing 'parallel' support and 0.004 (CI: 0.003, 0.005) in schools classified as providing 'embedded' support. The OR for this analysis was 1.082 (CI: 0.737, 1.587), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.021 (CI: -0.080, 0.122; including 0 and therefore, not statistically significant). The adjusted mean probability of **exclusion** for 'at-risk' students was 0.145 (CI: 0.133, 0.158) in schools classified as providing 'parallel' support and 0.146 (CI: 0.129, 0.164) in schools classified as providing 'embedded' support. The OR for this analysis was 1.005 (CI: 0.845, 1.195), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.001 (CI: -0.044, 0.047; including 0 and therefore, not statistically significant). The adjusted mean probability of **unexplained exits** for 'at-risk' students was 0.050 (CI: 0.043, 0.058) in schools classified as providing 'parallel' support and 0.054 (CI: 0.044, 0.065) in schools classified as providing 'embedded' support. The OR for this analysis was 1.082 (CI: 0.830, 1.411), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.021 (CI: -0.049, 0.091; including 0 and therefore, not statistically significant). For all three outcomes, $p > 0.05$.

Table 18: Secondary analysis (the impact of the type of internal provision on suspension among students at risk of: suspension, I_RQ2a; exclusion, I_RQ2b; unexplained exits, I_RQ2c)

Outcome	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Probability of suspension	24,160	0.003 (0.003, 0.004)	12,910	0.004 (0.003, 0.005)	37,070	1.082 (0.737, 1.587)	0.021 (-0.080, 0.122)	0.688
Probability of exclusion	24,160	0.145 (0.133, 0.158)	12,910	0.146 (0.129, 0.164)	37,070	1.005 (0.845, 1.195)	0.001 (-0.044, 0.047)	0.959
Probability of unexplained exits	24,160	0.050 (0.043, 0.058)	12,910	0.054 (0.044, 0.065)	37,080	1.082 (0.830, 1.411)	0.021 (-0.049, 0.091)	0.561

Figure 5: Secondary analysis (I_RQ2a: the impact of the type of internal provision on suspension among students at risk of suspension)

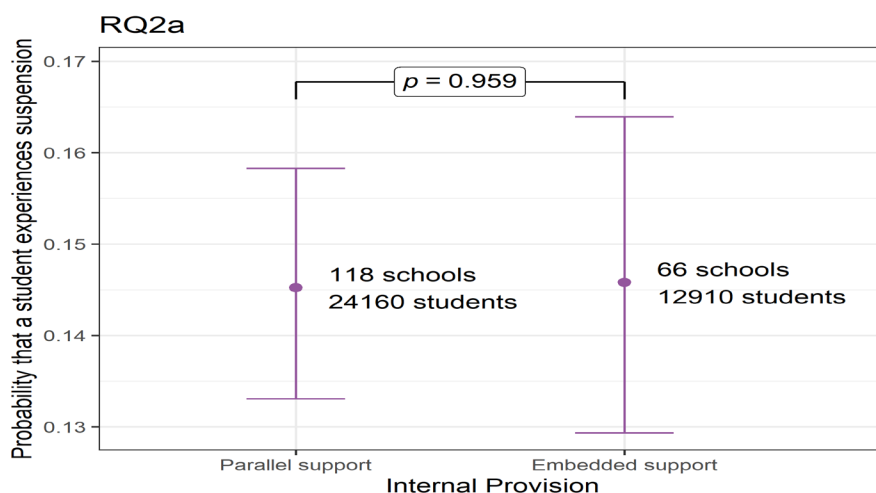


Figure 6: Secondary analysis (I_RQ2b: the impact of the type of internal provision on exclusion among students at risk of exclusion)

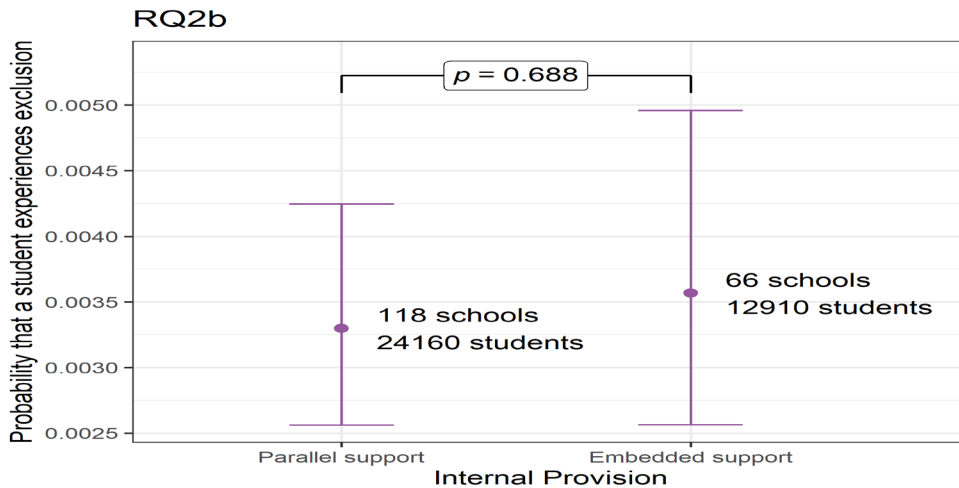
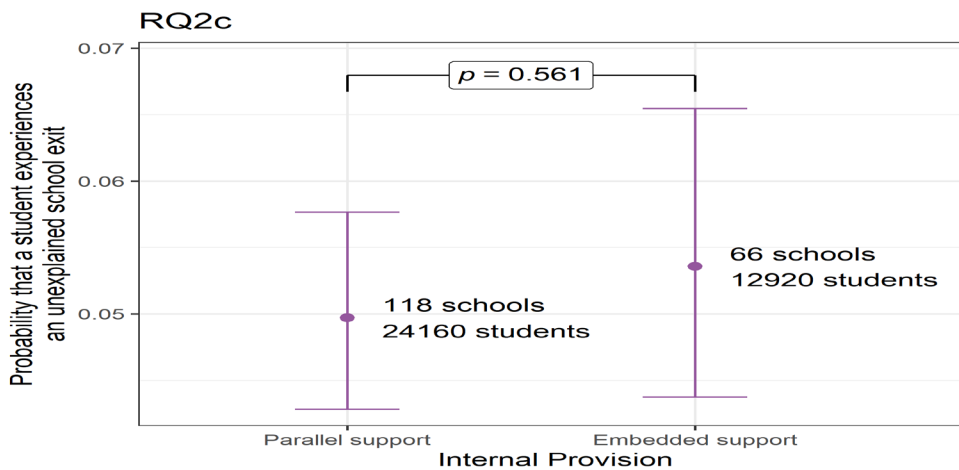


Figure 7: Secondary analysis (I_RQ2c: the impact of the type of internal provision on unexplained exits among students at risk of unexplained exits)



I_RQ3 repeated the primary analysis but for all secondary school students rather than those identified as at risk (Table 19, Figure 8):

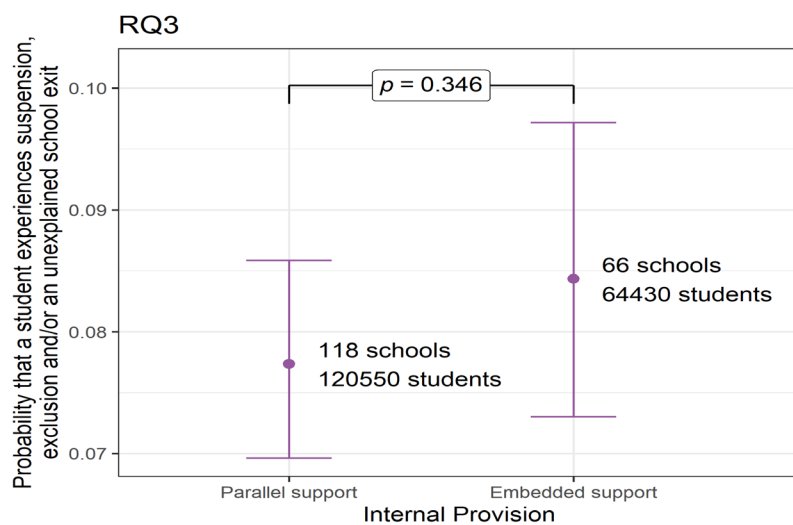
I_RQ3: What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among all secondary school students?

The adjusted mean probability of secondary school students experiencing the combined outcome (suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) was 0.077 (CI: 0.070, 0.086) in schools classified as providing 'parallel' support and 0.084 (CI: 0.073, 0.097) in schools classified as providing 'embedded' support. The OR for this analysis was 1.099 (CI: 0.903, 1.336), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.025 (CI: -0.027, 0.076). Both the OR and the effect size were not declared to be a statistically significant difference between the different types of internal provision, as $p=0.346$, and the CIs cross 1 and 0, respectively. Therefore, this analysis was unable to determine whether or not either type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) had a differential impact on the combined outcome (probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) for secondary school students.

Table 19: Secondary analysis (I_RQ3: the impact of the type of internal provision on the combined outcome, among all secondary students)

Outcome	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits	120,550	0.077 (0.070, 0.086)	64,430	0.084 (0.073, 0.097)	184,980	1.099 (0.903, 1.336)	0.025 (-0.027, 0.076)	0.346

Figure 8: Secondary analysis (I_RQ3: the impact of the type of internal provision on the combined outcome, among all secondary students)



I_RQ6 repeated the primary analysis for an outcome of persistent absence (rather than the combined outcome) and for all secondary school students rather than those identified as at risk (Table 20, Figure 9):

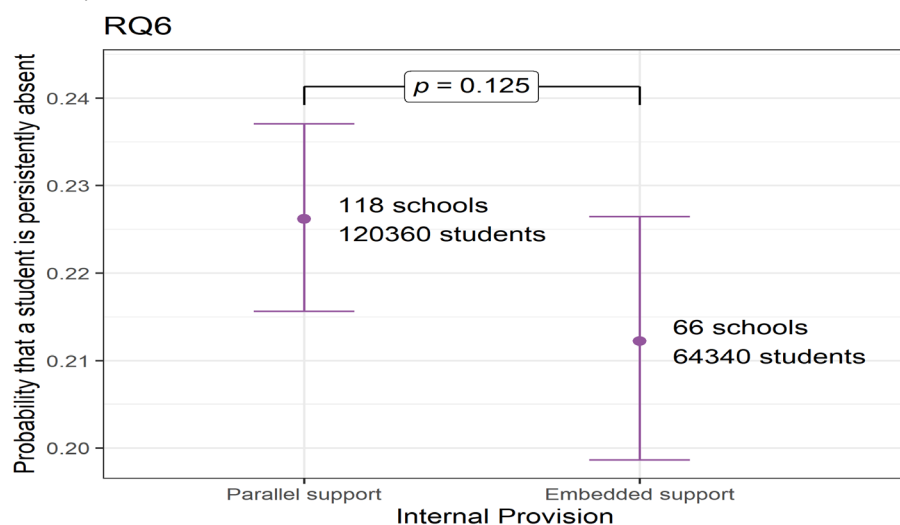
I_RQ6: What is the impact of the type of internal provision ('embedded' or 'parallel' support) on persistent absence among secondary school students?

No statistically significant impacts were found, and hence this analysis was unable to determine whether or not either of the types of internal provision had a differential impact on persistent absence for all students. The adjusted mean probability of persistent absence for secondary school students was 0.226 (CI: 0.216, 0.237) in schools classified as providing 'parallel' support and 0.212 (CI: 0.199, 0.226) in schools classified as providing 'embedded' support. The OR for this analysis was 0.922 (CI: 0.830, 1.023), with a Cox Index effect size of -0.021 (CI: -0.049, 0.006); CIs cross 1 and 0, respectively.

Table 20: Secondary analysis (I_RQ6: the impact of the type of internal provision on the likelihood of persistent absence, among all secondary students)

Outcome	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Probability of persistent absence	120,360	0.226 (0.216, 0.237)	64,430	0.212 (0.199, 0.226)	184,700	0.922 (0.830, 1.023)	-0.021 (-0.049, 0.006)	0.125

Figure 9: Secondary analysis (I_RQ6: the impact of the type of internal provision on the likelihood of persistent absence, among all secondary students)



The impact of any type of ‘internal provision’ (compared with ‘undefined provision’) on student outcomes

Three secondary analyses estimated impacts comparing schools reporting having any type of internal provision with schools with ‘undefined provision’. I_RQ4 repeated the primary analysis but for this contrast rather than comparing between different types on internal provision:

I_RQ4: What is the impact of having any internal provision on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among secondary school students at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits, compared with ‘undefined provision’⁵⁵?

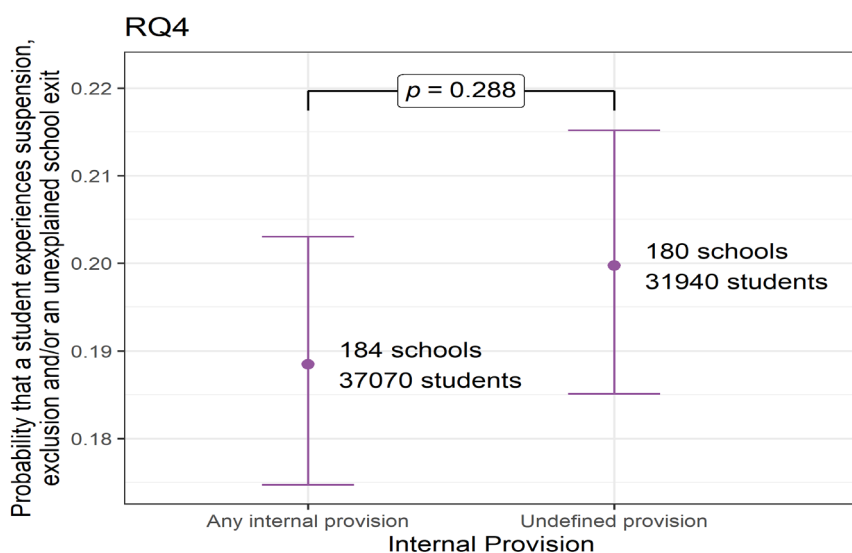
Table 21 and Figure 10 show that no statistically significant impacts were found. The analysis was unable to determine whether schools in the group that specified an internal provision approach and schools with ‘undefined provision’ had a differential impact on the combined outcome for the ‘at-risk’ students. The adjusted mean probability of ‘at-risk’ students experiencing the combined outcome (suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) was 0.188 (CI: 0.175, 0.203) in schools classified as having any type of internal provision and 0.200 (CI: 0.185, 0.215) in schools classified as having ‘undefined provision’. The OR for this analysis was 1.075 (CI: 0.941, 1.227), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.019 (CI: -0.016, 0.054). Both the OR and the effect size were not declared to be a statistically significant difference between the different types of internal provision, as $p=0.228$, and the CIs cross 1 and 0, respectively.

⁵⁵ Originally labelled in the study plan as schools with ‘no internal AP’. However, the IPE indicated that there was a much more complex picture in these schools that was harder for schools (and the research team) to define and classify. As these schools were providing some form of support, rather than no support at all, this group is referred to as having ‘undefined provision’ throughout this report.

Table 21: Secondary analysis (I_RQ4: the impact of having any ‘defined internal provision’ on the combined outcome, among students ‘at risk’ of the combined outcome)

Outcome	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	Any ‘internal provision’		‘Undefined provision’		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	N	Mean (95% CI)				
Probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits	37,070	0.188 (0.175, 0.203)	31,940	0.200 (0.185, 0.215)	69,010	1.075 (0.941, 1.227)	0.019 (-0.016, 0.054)	0.288

Figure 10: Secondary analysis (I_RQ4: the impact of having any ‘defined internal provision’ on the combined outcome, among students ‘at risk’ of the combined outcome)



Secondary analysis I_RQ5 was similar to that of I_RQ4 but focused on all students rather than those at risk:

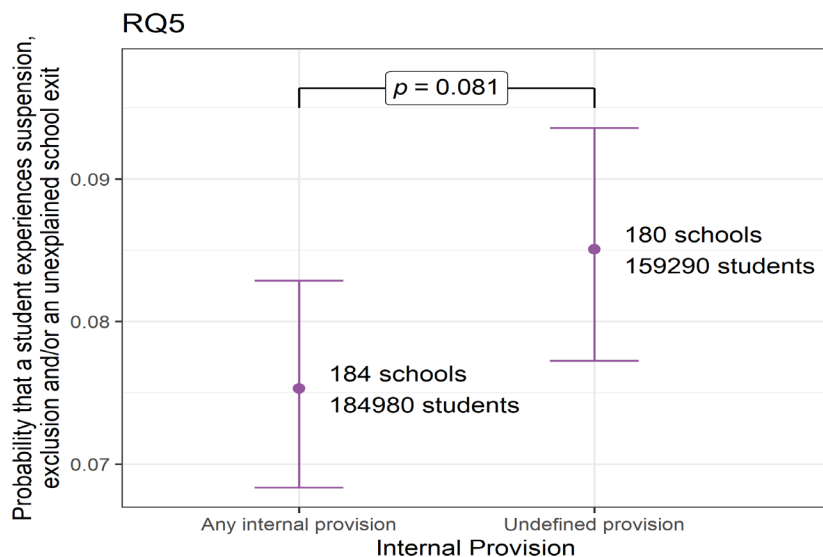
I_RQ5: What is the impact of having any internal provision on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among all secondary school students, compared with ‘undefined provision’?

The adjusted mean probability of secondary school students experiencing the combined outcome (suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) was 0.075 (CI: 0.068, 0.083) in schools classified as having any type of internal provision and 0.085 (CI: 0.077, 0.094) in schools classified as having ‘undefined provision’. The OR for this analysis was 1.142 (CI: 0.984, 1.325), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.035 (CI: -0.004, 0.074). Both the OR and the effect size were not declared to be a statistically significant difference between the different types of internal provision, as the CIs cross 1 and 0, respectively. However, the analysis (Table 22 and Figure 11) was associated with a p-value (p=0.081) which approached the threshold of significance. It was ultimately unable to determine whether having any ‘internal provision’ had a differential impact on the combined outcome among all students (when compared with schools which reported ‘undefined provision’). Compared with the analysis for I_RQ1, the smaller p-value may be an artefact of the larger sample included in the I_RQ5 analysis. It may also reflect the absence of some of the methodological limitations of this study (discussed in the ‘Conclusions’ section), for example, the comparison of schools classified by the LCA, and the restriction of the analysis to an ‘at-risk’ subsample identified using a data-driven approach.

Table 22: Secondary analysis (I_RQ5: the impact of having any ‘defined internal provision’ on the combined outcome, among all secondary students)

Outcome	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	Any ‘internal provision’		‘Undefined provision’		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Probability of suspension, exclusion and/or unexplained school exits	184,980	0.075 (0.068, 0.083)	159,290	0.085 (0.077, 0.094)	344,270	1.142 (0.984, 1.325)	0.035 (-0.004, 0.074)	0.081

Figure 11: Secondary analysis (I_RQ5: the impact of having any ‘defined internal provision’ on the combined outcome, among all secondary students)



I_RQ7 considered the impact of any type of ‘internal provision’ on the probability of persistent absence:

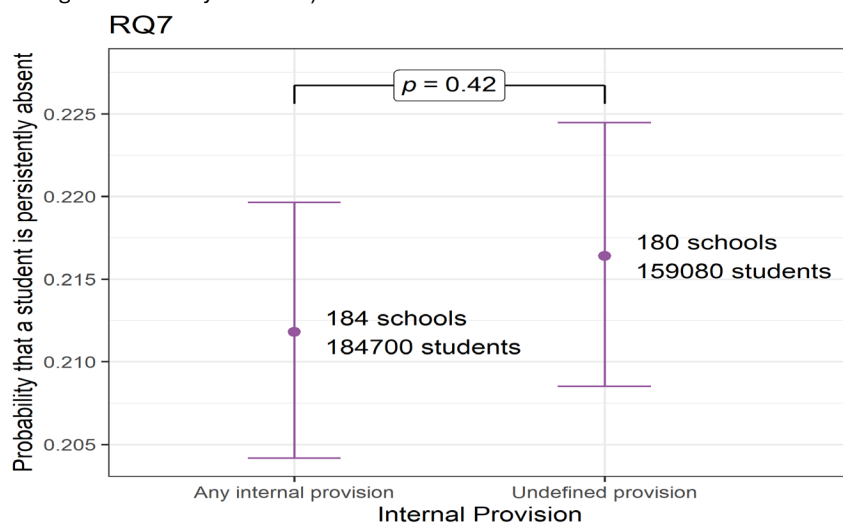
I_RQ7: What is the impact of having any internal provision on persistent absence among secondary school students, compared with ‘undefined provision’?

The adjusted mean probability of persistent absence for secondary school students was 0.212 (CI: 0.204, 0.220) in schools classified as having any type of internal provision and 0.216 (CI: 0.209, 0.224) in schools classified as having ‘undefined provision’. The OR for this analysis was 1.028 (CI: 0.962, 1.098), with a Cox Index effect size of 0.007 (CI: -0.010, 0.025). Both the OR and the effect size were not declared to be a statistically significant difference between the different types of internal provision, as the CIs cross 1 and 0, respectively and $p=0.420$. This analysis (Table 23 and Figure 15) did not find evidence that having any ‘internal provision’ had a differential impact on persistent absence among all students (when compared with schools with ‘undefined provision’).

Table 23: Secondary analysis (I_RQ7: the impact of having any ‘defined internal provision’ on the likelihood of persistent absence, among all secondary students)

Outcome	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	Any ‘internal provision’		‘Undefined provision’		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Probability of persistent absence	184,700	0.212 (0.204, 0.220)	159,080	0.216 (0.209, 0.224)	343,780	1.028 (0.962, 1.098)	0.007 (-0.010, 0.025)	0.420

Figure 12: Secondary analysis (I_RQ7: the impact of having any ‘defined internal provision’ on the likelihood of persistent absence, among all secondary students)



Subgroup analysis

Four analyses repeated the primary analysis but for subgroups of students (I_RQ8):

I_RQ8: What is the impact of the type of internal provision (‘embedded’ or ‘parallel’ support) on the probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits among secondary school students at risk of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exits:

- for FSM-eligible students?
- by year group (as a proxy for age)?
- by ethnicity?
- by sex?

These analyses estimated the impact (using interaction terms⁵⁶) of the type of internal provision on the combined outcome. Estimates (none of which are statistically significant⁵⁷) are shown in Tables 24 to 27 below, with all CIs associated with ORs and Cox Indexes crossing 1 and 0, respectively. Therefore, none of the subgroup analyses were able to determine whether or not either type of internal provision (‘embedded’ or ‘parallel’ support) had a differential impact on the combined outcome (probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) among the ‘at-risk’ group of students.

⁵⁶ Tables of estimates from analyses using subsamples are included in Further Appendix I.

⁵⁷ Although no statistically significant effects were observed, it is important to note that the evaluation was not designed to be powered for subgroup analysis, and multiple analyses increase the chance of type I errors.

Table 24: FSM subgroup analysis, I_RQ8a: the impact of the type of internal provision on the primary outcome (the likelihood of experiencing a suspension, an exclusion, or an unexplained exit), among FSM students 'at risk' of experiencing the outcome

FSM-eligible	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Yes	17,810	0.193 (0.177, 0.210)	9,060	0.207 (0.184, 0.231)	26,870	1.089 (0.910, 1.303)	0.022 (-0.025, 0.070)	0.351
No or missing	6,350	0.192 (0.174, 0.211)	3,860	0.195 (0.171, 0.222)	10,210	1.022 (0.838, 1.246)	0.006 (-0.047, 0.058)	0.833

Table 25: Year group subgroup analysis, I_RQ8b: the impact of the type of internal provision on the primary outcome (the likelihood of experiencing a suspension, an exclusion, or an unexplained exit), among students 'at risk' of experiencing the outcome

Year group	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Year 7	2,530	0.158 (0.140, 0.178)	1,390	0.157 (0.133, 0.184)	3,920	0.993 (0.781, 1.263)	-0.002 (-0.065, 0.061)	0.954
Year 8	6,590	0.190 (0.172, 0.208)	3,500	0.209 (0.184, 0.236)	10,090	1.130 (0.928, 1.376)	0.032 (-0.020, 0.084)	0.224
Year 9	6,650	0.204 (0.186, 0.223)	3,500	0.216 (0.191, 0.244)	10,150	1.077 (0.884, 1.312)	0.019 (-0.032, 0.071)	0.462
Year 10	5,250	0.210 (0.191, 0.231)	2,770	0.219 (0.193, 0.248)	8,020	1.054 (0.861, 1.290)	0.014 (-0.040, 0.067)	0.613
Year 11	3,150	0.181 (0.162, 0.202)	1,760	0.183 (0.157, 0.212)	4,910	1.013 (0.808, 1.269)	0.003 (-0.056, 0.063)	0.911

Table 26: Ethnicity subgroup analysis, I_RQ8c: the impact of the type of internal provision on the primary outcome (the likelihood of experiencing a suspension, an exclusion, or an unexplained exit), among students 'at risk' of experiencing the outcome

Ethnicity	Adjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
White	17,850	0.169 (0.154, 0.185)	10,040	0.180 (0.160, 0.203)	27,890	1.080 (0.904, 1.291)	0.020 (-0.027, 0.067)	0.397
Asian	1,040	0.151 (0.122, 0.184)	450	0.136 (0.102, 0.178)	1,490	0.885 (0.595, 1.317)	-0.032 (-0.137, 0.072)	0.547
Mixed	2,130	0.178 (0.157, 0.202)	1,010	0.191 (0.161, 0.225)	3,140	1.087 (0.842, 1.403)	0.022 (-0.045, 0.089)	0.524
Black	1,300	0.155 (0.131, 0.184)	480	0.171 (0.136, 0.213)	1,780	1.122 (0.801, 1.570)	0.030 (-0.058, 0.119)	0.503
Chinese, or any other	430	0.155 (0.117, 0.202)	210	0.211 (0.157, 0.277)	640	1.461 (0.904, 2.362)	0.100 (-0.027, 0.226)	0.122
Unclassified, or missing	1,430	0.456 (0.418, 0.494)	730	0.448 (0.397, 0.500)	2,160	0.969 (0.751, 1.249)	-0.008 (-0.075, 0.059)	0.806

Table 27: Sex subgroup analysis, I_RQ8d: the impact of the type of internal provision on the primary outcome (the likelihood of experiencing a suspension, an exclusion or an unexplained exit), among students 'at risk' of experiencing the outcome

Sex	Unadjusted means				Effect size			
	'Parallel' support		'Embedded' support		Total n	OR (95% CI)	Cox Index (95% CI)	P-value
	n	Mean (95% CI)	n	Mean (95% CI)				
Female	8,280	0.179 (0.163, 0.197)	4,820	0.188 (0.166, 0.213)	13,100	1.059 (0.876, 1.282)	0.015 (-0.035, 0.065)	0.553
Male	15,880	0.181 (0.165, 0.197)	8,090	0.192 (0.170, 0.216)	23,970	1.077 (0.900, 1.290)	0.020 (-0.028, 0.067)	0.418

Exploratory analysis

Due to routing in the survey, there were five subsets of questions which were posed to different groups of respondents. Five penalised lasso regression models (see 'Impact evaluation phase methods: Exploratory analyses' section) were run using questions which were shown to:

- all respondents (N student: 458,700);
- respondents who indicated that their school provided out of class provision for Key Stage 3 (N student: 200,790);
- respondents who indicated that their school provided out of class provision for Key Stage 4 (N student: 205,320);
- respondents who indicated that their school provided in class provision for Key Stage 3 (N student: 214,370);
- respondents who indicated that their school provided in class provision for Key Stage 4 (N student: 220,090).

Means (proportions) of the combined outcome (probability of suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit) were calculated for each response to each survey question. Figures showing these means for all survey questions are included in Further Appendix H. Some of the questions (from any of the five models) with the largest differences between means among their response options are described below. This analysis is exploratory and has no matching/weighting. Discussion here is to inform future research and causation should not be assumed in either direction.

Some of the results that emerged from this exploratory analysis indicated that where there appeared to be some uncertainty about the school's process, there appeared to also be a higher likelihood of students in the school experiencing the combined outcome:

- Students in schools where respondents chose not to respond to the question: 'Who, among the following roles, typically makes the decision for a student to receive this support?' appear to have **higher** likelihood of experiencing the combined outcome than students in schools where respondents did answer this question.
- Students in schools where respondents chose not to respond to the question: 'What type of space is used for this provision?' appear to have **higher** likelihood of experiencing the combined outcome than students in schools where respondents did answer this question.
- Students in schools where respondents answered, 'Don't know' to the question: 'What type of support do students attending the provision receive?' appear to have **higher** likelihood of experiencing the combined outcome than students in schools where respondents did not select 'Don't know' in answer to this question.
- Students in schools where respondents answered 'No assessment of student's specific needs' to the question: 'Who, if anyone, assesses a student's needs when a student is initially referred for this support?' appear to have **higher** likelihood of experiencing the combined outcome than students in schools where respondents chose any other answer to this question (class teacher, SEMH team, head of year/middle leader, pastoral support team, did not respond).

Two other statements emerged as indicating a higher likelihood of students in the school experiencing the combined outcome:

- Students in schools where respondents answered 'No' to the question: 'Does your school have access to one or more alternative provision schools/providers locally?' appear to have **higher** likelihood of experiencing the combined outcome than students in schools where respondents chose any other answer to this question ('Yes', 'Don't know', did not respond).
- Students in schools where respondents answered 'Agree' to the question: 'What is the position of your school in relation to the following statements? – Students who are disruptive, even at low level, should not

be in a mainstream classroom' appear to have **higher** likelihood of experiencing the combined outcome than students in schools where respondents chose any other answer to this question ('Strongly agree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Disagree', 'Strongly disagree', 'Don't know', did not respond).

A rather intriguing result emerged, suggesting that where a school did not look into the underlying cause of disruptive behaviour students were less likely to have a high probability of being excluded, suspended, or have an unexplained school exit. Further research would be needed to understand this exploratory result more fully.

- Students in schools where respondents answered 'Strongly disagree' to the question: 'What is the position of your school in relation to the following statements? – When students are disruptive, it is important to consider the underlying causes for their behaviour' appear to have **lower** likelihood of experiencing the combined outcome than students in schools where respondents chose any other answer to this question ('Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Disagree', 'Don't know', did not respond).

Implementation and Process Evaluation results

Defining internal provision in the IPE schools

This section begins by outlining how internal provision is defined within the 18 IPE schools. This contextual insight is important, as it influences how the findings are interpreted and presented, ensuring they reflect practice as operationalised by the participating schools.

Defining internal provision in mainstream secondary schools

The interviews with senior leaders from 12 schools in the ‘parallel’ and ‘embedded’ support groups explored the internal provision they had in place for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. Although the six schools in the ‘undefined provision’ group indicated they did not have any internal provision⁵⁸ in their survey response, they did report having students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion in their schools, so their interviews explored their schools’ approach towards those students.

As this study was exploratory, and previous research and detailed guidance around the design and delivery of internal provision is limited, a definition of internal provision was not provided to interviewees. This was to allow respondents to interpret the term based on their own school context, enabling the research to explore how internal provision is understood and implemented in practice across the schools. The interviews were, however, semi-structured to explore any separate internal provision a school might have (i.e. where students receive support in a separate place in the school, outside their usual classroom for all/most of their taught timetable), as well as any in-class provision (i.e. where students remain with their main class and have additional support that may take place within or outside the class). In addition, interviewees were not provided with a definition of ‘students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion’ to allow for a broader consideration of student needs, as perceived and interpreted within individual schools.

For the purposes of this study, ‘isolation units’ or ‘removal/exclusion rooms’ where students are taken out of their usual class, typically for short periods of time due to disruptive behaviour or for contravening school rules were not classified as internal provision. These rooms are generally used by schools for behaviour management and while students are typically expected to continue with their classwork in these settings, they do not usually offer other additional support or structured intervention. Due to this distinction, they were not a focus of the interviews or case studies although some schools did describe how these were used in their schools. Similarly, specialist facilities in IPE schools aimed only at SEND students (e.g. resourced provisions, often funded by the local authority and typically providing support to students with EHCPs), were not classified as internal provision. In some IPE schools where isolation rooms and specialist facilities existed, it was possible that ‘at-risk’ students could access these as well as any internal provision. During the interviews, the research team focused on the internal provision support, although it is possible that some interviewees (e.g. students and parents/carers in particular) may have been unaware of how some of the support was used and funded, and as a result talked about the support received as a whole.

The subjective nature of internal provision

Across all 18 schools, regardless of their internal provision group, leaders described offering support, which was school led, school based, and school funded for students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence. Provision ranged from more universal support (potentially available to all students, but typically being accessed by ‘at-risk’ students as part of early intervention), all the way to highly targeted separate units on the school site (focusing specifically on those most at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence [including provision that would typically align with DfE definitions of PSUs or in-school alternative provision units—see ‘Introduction’ section for further details]). The support described by schools often overlapped with other support systems such as SEND provision, where students had multiple and complex needs. As a result, it was often difficult to clearly distinguish internal provision from other forms of school support given the integrated

⁵⁸ Five of the six IPE schools in the ‘undefined provision’ group indicated in the scoping phase survey that they had access to one or more external alternative provision schools/providers locally.

and interdependent nature of the approaches. Further details of the support offered by the IPE schools is explored later in the 'How the support operates in practice' section.

Although senior leaders from the six schools in the 'undefined provision' group initially reported in the scoping phase survey that they did not have provision, they all went on to describe some form of school support that students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion could access. Typically, this provision was part of the school's universal support offer with some level of targeting for students at risk of exclusion or persistent absence, this might include, for example, support from pastoral staff for students exhibiting issues with behaviour. None of the six IPE schools in the 'undefined provision' group had a separate internal provision unit. This finding may help explain why schools in this group responded the way they did in the scoping phase survey, indicating that they viewed the phrase 'internal provision' as referring to provision in a separate physical space within a school.

Together these findings suggest that the questions asked in the closed-response scoping phase survey may not have captured all the nuanced aspects of both schools' provision and their understanding of internal provision. The findings of the qualitative interviews and visits, which were able to delve into the details of provision, show that none of the schools that took part in the IPE were truly 'no provision' and that there appears to be no universally shared definition of 'internal provision'. These findings informed the label applied to these schools in our reporting (see 'Choices defined for this study' section for details) and the conclusions which could be drawn from the impact analysis. (see 'Conclusions' section).

The alignment of IPE school approaches and the internal provision groups ('parallel', 'embedded', and 'undefined provision')

The internal provision groups assigned to schools based on their responses to the scoping phase survey (i.e. 'parallel', 'embedded', and 'undefined provision'), were compared to the data from the in-depth interviews for all 18 IPE schools. This resulted in IPE schools being classified along a spectrum from 'fully aligned' to their group allocation, where the qualitative data strongly and consistently reflected the group characteristics,⁵⁹ to 'not aligned' where there was no meaningful connection between the qualitative data and the group characteristics.

As set out in Table 28 below, the qualitative data from schools with 'parallel' and 'embedded' support generally showed some alignment with their assigned group but they also typically shared some characteristics with the other group (as expected due to membership in a group being defined by probability, i.e. being more likely to be a member of one than the other). In practice, this seems to be due to the multiple and varied approaches these schools appear to take for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, with support drawing on a range of provision (as described later in the section on 'How the support operates in practice'). As a result, elements of practice spanned across the different internal provision groups and reflected different features, rather than aligning with a single group. For example, while one aspect of the same school's internal provision support might be highly tailored, ongoing and led by a senior leader (characteristics of the 'embedded' support group), another aspect might be led by a teaching assistant and provided to a small number of students for a limited time (characteristics of the 'parallel' support group). As described later in this section, schools may have different types of support, according to student need, which can vary by cohort, age, and the specific challenges faced in different contexts.

As all of the IPE schools in the 'undefined provision' group described some form of support for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion during their interviews (with the caveat that the boundary between universal support and internal provision is subjective and these interact with other forms of school provision such as SEND support, as described in the previous section), these schools were deemed to not align to their internal provision group. As discussed later in the 'Conclusion' section, this finding is a limitation of the study. However, the extent to which this reflects a wider pattern across the 'undefined provision' group of schools is unknown.

⁵⁹ Key differences between schools categorised as offering 'parallel' and 'embedded' support summarised in Table 3 and in the "Choices defined for this study" section.

Table 28: Alignment of IPE school support to internal provision groups

Internal provision group assigned to schools based on scoping study survey responses	Fully aligned	Largely aligned	Partially aligned	Not aligned
	All qualitative data strongly and consistently reflects the group characteristics	Most qualitative data supports the group characteristics	Some qualitative data reflects the group characteristics	No alignment between the qualitative data and the group characteristics
‘Parallel’ support (n=6 schools)	0 schools	1 school	5 schools	0 schools
‘Embedded’ support (n= 6 schools)	1 school	2 schools	3 schools	0 schools
‘Undefined provision’ (n= 6 schools)	0 schools	0 schools	0 schools	6 schools All IPE schools in this group had some form of support for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion
Total IPE schools n=18	1 school	3 schools	8 schools	6 schools

While Table 28 highlights that the internal provision in IPE schools did not appear to be strongly aligned to their LCA classifications, further analysis revealed specific areas of overlap between the groups. Some schools assigned to different internal provision groups by the LCA/survey responses shared similar models of delivery as schools assigned to another group (see Table 29).

Table 29: Intersecting features of internal provision across the three groups

Internal provision group assigned by LCA	No. of IPE schools	Features observed in the IPE
‘Parallel’ support (six IPE schools)	Three	Internal provision in these three schools primarily involved support delivered in separate units
	Three	Internal provision in these six schools involved a combination of support delivered in separate units as well as support for students that remain with their main class group
‘Embedded’ support (six IPE schools)	Three	
	Three	The internal provision in these nine schools involved delivery of support for students that remain with their main class group. None of these schools had separate units
‘Undefined provision’ (six IPE schools)	Six	
Total IPE schools n=18		

Where possible, the IPE results are discussed in relation to the internal provision groups (‘parallel’ and ‘embedded’, and ‘undefined provision’). However, in most cases, patterns in the findings were not delineated by group allocation as analysis of the qualitative data showed that the LCA groups did not appear to reflect clear and consistent groupings of differences in practice across the IPE schools. This meant the LCA groups were not meaningful units within the qualitative analysis for understanding and interpreting the results. As a result, the IPE findings presented in the following sections are discussed primarily at an overarching level across all of the IPE schools, with differences by characteristics described where relevant and appropriate.

Key factors that drive schools’ approaches to internal provision (IPE_RQ1)

Schools’ approaches to internal provision were shaped by student needs, each schools’ unique context and ethos and by the views of school leaders.

Overall, schools (across the three groups: ‘parallel’; ‘embedded’; and ‘undefined’) appeared to have an inclusive ethos, with leaders generally expressing a commitment to support and retain students with complex and challenging needs in their schools. This was a key driver underpinning the development of their own internal provision support.

School staff described a wide range of student needs, which were perceived to have contributed to an increasing number of young people at risk of persistent absence, suspension, and permanent exclusion, which in turn was influencing their internal provision offer. Several leaders highlighted a particular rise in mental health issues, a higher incidence of emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)/emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA) following the Covid-19 pandemic and a significant increase in both the prevalence and complexity of SEND. Interviewees also pointed to various family and local-context factors, which presented additional challenges for students, such as being a looked-after child, living in poverty, and experiencing safeguarding issues. Leaders recognised that these needs often required different or more extensive support and had developed their internal provision in response. In some cases, specific needs or issues were reported to be more pronounced within certain cohorts or groups of students, and these could shift over time, sometimes unexpectedly, which resulted in changes to internal provision. In addition, leaders emphasised that despite the growing numbers of students presenting with multiple and complex needs in their schools, external support from statutory agencies (local authorities, children’s social care and health, etc.) was often limited or unavailable.

A few interviews also said their provision was driven by the lack of capacity at external alternative provision. This included insufficient spaces to meet demand as well as limited availability of certain types of provision, such as units to support certain age groups. Additionally, a few leaders cited the high cost of commissioning private providers to deliver external alternative provision as a key factor in their decision to create their own onsite separate internal provision units.

How the support operates in practice

The following sections explore how support for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion was operationalised across the 18 IPE schools. They focus on provision that was in place during the 2023/2024 academic year (i.e. current practice at the time of completing the scoping phase survey). It is important to acknowledge that the strategies and practices outlined here were implemented by a relatively small number of IPE schools in response to the complex and often highly challenging needs of their students. While on the whole, most interviewees described support that could be applied to other school contexts, some of the approaches described may represent potential barriers (e.g. practical, legal, and ethical) which are discussed below, that need careful consideration. These factors should be taken into account when interpreting the findings and assessing their suitability for implementation in other schools.

The practice across and within individual IPE schools varied significantly reflecting a wide range of approaches taken. Across all 18 schools, regardless of internal provision group, leaders described support which was school led, school based, and school funded for students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence. As Table 30 illustrates, the provision they described ranged from more universal support, which may be available to all students in these schools, to highly targeted separate in-school units, focused specifically on those most at risk of exclusion or persistent absence (including provision that would typically align with DfE definitions of PSUs or in-school alternative provision units—see ‘Introduction’ section for details). School practices have been grouped in Table 30 into categories that emerged through the qualitative analysis (i.e. universal, targeted, and personalised). A single IPE school could have one, two, or all three of these types of support in place. Interviewees were not asked systematically about the presence of each strategy and therefore, this table should be interpreted as indicative rather than fully comparable across schools. The strategies have also been grouped based on where they are *typically* used: either within a student’s usual mainstream classroom (‘inside the classroom’) or outside of it (‘outside the classroom’). The ‘outside the classroom’ category refers to approaches that, while still part of the mainstream school, take place outside the regular class environment.

Table 30: The range of internal provision strategies for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion described by interviewees in IPE schools and links to their assigned LCA model groups

Type of support	Example strategies implemented by IPE schools	Links between support strategies and LCA model groups ('parallel', 'embedded', and 'undefined provision')
Universal		
Inclusive practice for all students (support not only or specifically for those 'at risk' but will include them)	Inside the classroom: Relational approaches (e.g. trauma informed practice and restorative practice), positive behaviour policy, Personal, Social, Health, and Economic curriculum	All schools described using universal strategies to support students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion
	Outside the classroom: Pastoral support, key adults in school, 'safe'/'support' spaces, breakfast clubs, uniform schemes, student voice, parent/carer information sharing, school organisation arrangements (e.g. reduced-transition timetabling and non-teaching heads of year)	
Targeted		
Standard intervention for specific young people seen as 'at risk'	Inside the classroom: Pastoral and behaviour check-in/response systems, movement/regulation breaks, differentiated learning support and adjustments, teaching assistant support, small group work, peer support, teaching delivery models (e.g. setting for groups with certain needs/abilities, use of primary trained teachers)	Schools across the three model groups reported using targeted strategies All of the IPE 'parallel' support schools and half of the 'embedded' support schools had internal provision units. These schools also reported other targeted support strategies as part of the provision in their school
	Outside the classroom: Emotional literacy support, counselling, mentoring, therapeutic support (e.g. art therapy, animal therapy), engagement sessions (e.g. to promote personal development), behaviour support ^a / interventions (e.g. to help students to regulate their emotions), literacy/numeracy interventions, speech and language support ^b , secondary school transition support, parent/carer contact, attendance officer support/home-school visits, student needs assessments, internal provision units (including short- and long-term placements)	
Personalised		
Adapting the support and interventions on offer to meet the individual needs of the young person	Inside the classroom: Individual behaviour/attendance/learning support plans, one to one in-class support, assistive technology (e.g. laptops), reduced/adapted timetables reduced/adapted curricula Outside the classroom: Alternative curriculum activities (e.g. sessions delivered in school and short-term school-funded places with external providers), online learning ^c	A few schools in the 'embedded', 'parallel', and 'undefined provision' support groups reported using personalised support strategies—these were a less common reported feature of the internal provision support described overall

^a Some interviewees described how 'isolation units' or 'removal/exclusion rooms' were used by schools for behaviour management. These were not considered as 'provision' for the purposes of the school survey.

^b Sometimes externally funded/provided.

^c Accessed by students in school and/or at home.

IPE schools differed in how, and the extent to which, the range of provision outlined in Table 30 was offered in their school. The schools typically took a needs-led approach, selecting and combining different forms of provision (universal, targeted, and personalised) and strategies where they were available. This meant that the internal provision 'offer' not only varied significantly between IPE schools it also varied for different students within the same school. Some of the support was adopted primarily as part of universal and early help and provided to students that were beginning to show signs of need. Here, IPE schools would generally focus on providing support to prevent issues escalating and more significant challenges related to attendance and behaviour emerging. In other cases, where students' levels of need were highest, and where they were considered most at risk of persistent absence or exclusion these students might be engaged with universal support alongside other layers of internal provision. The boundaries between the different types of provision are not rigid and support

can overlap. Therefore, these should be understood as part of a continuum of support rather than distinct and separate types.

In some cases, the provision described may be linked to support for SEND outlined in individuals EHCPs, such as (one to one teaching assistant support). While this type of support may focus on facilitating access to the curriculum and supporting progress with learning, and not relate explicitly to their attendance or behaviour, it was mentioned by interviewees in the context of addressing persistent absence and/or exclusion. Due to some uncertainty and overlap in how this support is interpreted it has been included in the range of internal provision here as this reflects the complexity and grey areas outlined in the interviews.

In addition to the range of internal provision offered in Table 30, the IPE schools, across the three model groups, also reported using externally provided support for students at risk of persistent absence and exclusion (although this was not internal provision, as another action taken by schools, it is mentioned briefly here). This included their students attending a short-term school placement elsewhere (e.g. through off-site direction) or making a permanent move to another school (e.g. through a 'managed move'). This was typically used by schools to provide individual students with a 'fresh start' in a different setting, access to specialist support, to prevent behaviour escalating further or, as a result of a serious incident—to maintain a safe school environment and to serve as an alternative to permanent exclusion. The point at which schools seek such provision appears to differ based on individual student needs and circumstances, and individual school contexts (e.g. including the availability of provision locally and reciprocal arrangements with local schools) rather than type or provision model of school (i.e. 'parallel' support, 'embedded' support, or 'undefined provision').

One senior leader in an 'embedded' support school without a separate internal provision unit described how this type of school movement provided a change of environment and specific support that was not available in their school:

We've got [a number of] secondaries in a very small local area, so we've got 'intervention moves' and managed moves that can happen for a set amount of weeks. We've also got the access to 'school swaps'. That's something where, it's usually about one or two per day where we could put a student into another school, into their 'reset room' [isolation room] as an alternative to suspension, so that is something that we are utilising more. Then the other thing we have is a separate school, so it's almost like an alternative provision within the trust. It's a separate provision on the site of one of our other secondary schools and we can put students on longer placements there. We've got a couple of students who are currently there quite long term, and it allows some therapy work. It allows some kind of behaviour work and they can also access English and maths. (Senior leader)

The following sections offer further detail of the internal provision provided by IPE schools to students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, examining the different purposes and the specific features of the following types of support:

- universal support;
- targeted support; and
- personalised support.

Universal support

Across all the IPE schools, interviewees referred to various inclusive strategies and practices that their schools implemented to support the learning, engagement, and well-being of their student population. These strategies were rooted in the school's ethos and its school-wide systems and processes aiming to foster a culture of belonging, and in turn reduce the likelihood of issues around student attendance and behaviour arising.

Universal support approaches were emphasised by interviewees across all IPE schools regardless of internal provision group (e.g. 'parallel' support, 'embedded' support, or 'undefined provision') and these strategies played a role in helping schools to spot signs of concern and put support in place at an early opportunity. Although on the face of it, some of the actions that schools were taking to support students appeared to be some distance from explicitly addressing absence and

exclusion, interviewees viewed these elements as important for engaging harder to reach students, and as first steps before more formal steps may be required. In addition, while these strategies formed part of a school's 'universal' offer, implementation varied between individual schools due to differences in context, student needs, leadership approach/priorities, and funding.

It was evident in many of the IPE schools, particularly through the case study observations, that the whole-school environment was designed and organised to be inclusive. Interviewees described how this was particularly beneficial for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion to support their engagement with school. This was achieved, for example, by ensuring high staff visibility throughout the school, establishing routines to promote positive behaviour (e.g. creating timetable cycles to reduce the number of transitions between lessons to avoid triggering anxiety and behaviour issues) and providing 'safe' and 'calm' spaces that students could access.

Many of the interviewees who reported utilising universal support for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion emphasised strategies that enabled deeper student-staff engagement both inside and outside of the classroom. This involved staff implementing relational approaches (such as restorative and trauma informed practice) in their interactions with students to support their social and emotional needs. It was also acknowledged that having access to a trusted adult in school was key to building relationships and developing an increased understanding of each student. This commonly included staff with non-teaching roles, such as members of the pastoral team, who had the time to listen and engage with students. Student interviewees in particular reported valuing a member of staff who they can speak to comfortably and safely and who treats them with kindness and respect. They valued feeling known, heard, and understood by school staff and particularly appreciated being able to talk through an incident or emotional state that was causing them distress. The importance of having a trusted adult is illustrated in following comments by students from two different IPE schools:

[The member of staff has] showed that she actually cares and she wants me to come to school. And I feel like I can talk to her about stuff as well. (Student)

If something happens, there and then I need to talk about it quick. Otherwise, the whole day goes rubbish. (Student)

All school leaders interviewed also reflected on the local context in which their schools operated and how this had influenced the universal support their schools provided. Socio-economic challenges were frequently mentioned by interviewees as key factors contributing to the difficulties faced by students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. Specific barriers to student attendance and engagement, particularly for those students eligible for FSM, such as lack of food and clothing had prompted schools to provide additional support in these areas (e.g. through whole-school breakfast clubs and uniform schemes).

Some leaders also emphasised how they sought to establish their schools' expectations around attendance and behaviour at the earliest opportunity, this included regular communication with parents/carers (e.g. via the school website, social media, at transition events) about how they can support their child's participation.

Although these various universal strategies were, *in theory*, available to every student, several interviewees described how these were used with a degree of targeting for those at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion; this was also evident from the case study observations. For example, in one IPE school, although staff adopted relational approaches (including providing warm welcomes for students on arrival at school and participating in shared mealtimes), students with emerging well-being and behavioural concerns were prioritised for regular check-ins.

Targeted support

IPE schools across the three internal provision groups ('parallel' support, 'embedded' support, and 'undefined provision') implemented targeted in-class and withdrawal strategies (in varying degrees) to support students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, recognising that some young people required more support than universal provision. Interviewees tended to highlight targeted support strategies that focused on social, emotional, and behavioural support for specific young people considered to be 'at risk'.

Early intervention

Some interviewees referred to identification systems and processes as key components of their internal provision as these meant students' needs could be identified and addressed at an early stage. Although specific practices for identification of targeted support varied across IPE schools and some were more clearly defined than others, there were some common features. This included using a combination of monitoring data (e.g. attendance, behaviour, and safeguarding indicators) and pastoral insights (e.g. via form tutors and heads of year sharing concerns and making referrals). A few interviewees noted that the relational culture in their schools (as outlined in the 'Universal support' section) meant staff knowing students well and therefore, foreseeing potential emerging challenges. Undertaking regular reviews of student data (typically on a weekly basis) and involving staff across various departments/with various roles (e.g. pastoral, SEND, safeguarding, attendance, and behaviour/inclusion) helped to ensure collaboration around the identification of needs and targeted support options. These processes would often lead to student assessments to explore any underlying needs to further inform support planning.

Some IPE schools emphasised that a key part of their identification processes was to work with feeder primary schools and with parents/carers prior to secondary school transition to identify students with needs and characteristics (such as persistent or emerging absenteeism, SEND/learning needs, social/emotional needs, behaviour needs, and/or family/contextual needs) that might result in their increased likelihood of attendance and behaviour issues. In this way, interviewees felt their schools could be more proactive and identify concerns early. Some schools had provided additional transition events and support for those target group of students upon joining the school. One senior leader explained how having an early understanding of student's needs was informing their internal provision:

We'd already tracked and identified a trend in the spike in suspensions in Year 7 and Year 8...We knew from previous years that the primary schools were telling us '[their] behaviour's appalling'...[in] primary school they kind of get them through...they sit outside the Headteacher's office and they're just managed, or they're one to one [with] the TA [teaching assistant] in the class. They were the kids that were most dysregulated and the ones that we needed to address. So, we looked at what we needed to do here in this school. (Senior leader)

Other interviewees described how they had established processes for setting and grouping students as part of their early intervention support. This included specific classes for target groups of Year 7 students working significantly below age-related expectations, using a primary teaching model and primary trained staff to help them access the curriculum and reduce the risk of longer-term disengagement from learning. One leader explained how they had implemented a cohort-based teaching model where teachers were assigned to specific year groups rather than subject-based departments to facilitate enhanced staff-student relationships and increase understanding of student needs:

Our Year 7 attendance is 97% and I would attribute that to the relationship that's there...So we locate [year groups] geographically in the same area [of the school]. Most year groups have a maths corridor, have a history, humanities corridor, an English corridor. We have a Year 7 corridor and so all the classrooms are very close to pastoral offices. Most of the teachers, particularly in Key Stage 3, only teach in one year group. So, let's say you were an English teacher. For me, you would teach the same lesson. You would plan one lesson, and you would deliver it five times to five different classes. (Senior leader)

Targeted response

All of the IPE schools reported providing short-term targeted interventions for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, which they accessed outside of their usual classes. These were typically time limited (e.g. one session per week for half a term or a term) and aimed at addressing students' underlying social, emotional, and behavioural issues. Some of the schools reported implementing a broader range of targeted interventions than others and involving varying numbers of students although there was no discernible pattern (in type and extent of targeted interventions) related to their internal provision group ('parallel' support, 'embedded' support, or 'undefined provision').

Examples of targeted interventions for students at risk of persistent absence and or exclusion in IPE schools:

- emotional literacy programmes (e.g. Emotional Literacy Support Assistance [ELSA]—structured sessions to help students identify and manage emotions, develop social skills, and build resilience);
- mentoring sessions (e.g. to build confidence, give guidance, and build supportive relationships);
- engagement sessions (e.g. to promote personal development that focus on specific themes, such as conflict, respect, and online safety);
- counselling (e.g. to support mental health and well-being when a young person has experienced trauma, bereavement, and/or anxiety); and
- therapeutic support (e.g. animal therapy, to explore emotions and experiences).

Schools drew on a combination of school staff such as teaching assistants, pastoral support staff, learning mentors, and school councillors, as well as staff from specialist external organisations to deliver targeted interventions. Interview and observational data from case study schools found these interventions took place in a range of settings within the IPE schools, including in dedicated sensory rooms and pastoral spaces. A few interviewees recognised the importance of avoiding co-location with internal isolation spaces that were designed to be punitive in nature and emphasised the need to normalise support within the mainstream school setting.

In addition to targeted interventions, interviewees also shared other examples of support strategies for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion that helped them to attend school and manage their emotions and behaviours throughout the school day. This included adapted lesson start and finish times, movement and regulation breaks, and allowing students to access trusted members of staff when needed. Trusted adults might be named in individual student support plans or listed on student lanyards, which could be shown to class teachers to authorise a pass out of lessons. This support was considered beneficial in helping these students to remain engaged and reduce the likelihood of disruption in classes and in the wider school environment. A parent/carer described how these targeted strategies were being utilised.

They give him a timeout pass, so if he gets aggressive in the class with teachers, other children, he's allowed to just put his hand up with the pass and go out the room, have five minutes. Obviously, he knows you can't be wandering around school. They don't allow that. But he can go on the corridor or to the pastoral office and speak to somebody. And then when he's calmed down you have to go back to lesson. (Parent/carer)

While targeted learning support strategies were present in IPE schools, these were not as strongly emphasised by interviewees as part of their response to students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence. Where they were mentioned, they included the use of differentiated teaching strategies, small group teaching opportunities, and support from teaching assistants to provide focused help to students in class. A few interviewees described the use of short-term interventions, including catch-up sessions, for those students with significant gaps in learning due to their behaviour and/or absence from school:

To try to prevent exclusion and prevent escalation towards permanent exclusion...[This is for the cohort with] the worst attendance, they're the worst for internal truancy and the worst for being late to lessons as well...The [SEMH lead teaching assistant] is leading some intervention [catch-up] sessions for those students because some have missed so much class and so much of the curriculum. (Senior leader)

Separate internal provision units

Although the 18 IPE schools demonstrated inclusive cultures and seemingly appeared committed to supporting and retaining students with complex needs, this commitment was sometimes operationalised in ways that involved a degree of

segregation. Half of the IPE schools had separate internal provision units on the school site,⁶⁰ this included all of the schools in the 'parallel' support group (n=6) and half of the schools in the 'embedded' group (n=3). In the main, these spaces were for those students with high levels of absence and/or with behavioural sanctions escalating toward exclusion—struggling to engage with education due to behavioural, emotional, and/or other challenges. Some IPE schools had multiple internal provision units, each catering to different student cohorts and needs. Overall, while there was variation between the schools in how internal provision units operated there were no clear patterns observed within either the 'parallel' or 'embedded' support groups. None of the schools in the 'undefined provision' group however, had a separate internal provision unit. Among the schools without separate units, a few reported that they were planning to establish such provision in the future or were considering it.

Purpose of internal provision units in IPE schools

The overarching reason IPE schools established separate units was to provide an alternative setting to enable students to remain at the school (either in the provision full time or to reintegrate back into their usual classes). In many cases, these provisions were used to accommodate students who would have likely otherwise been suspended and/or permanently excluded. Internal provision units gave schools an alternative strategy allowing those students to remain in school but separated from the main school environment. Some leaders explained that they had established their separate units due to concerns about quality of external alternative provision, as one headteacher highlighted:

Our local area has got one of the worst [external] alternative provisions on the planet. Look, you can't send kids in there because it's not a quality provision. I mean, they're permanently excluding from the alternative provision, do you know what I mean? And none of my parents will buy into that. (Senior leader)

Four of the nine schools with internal provision units operated separate provision for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students, tailored to the specific needs and academic curriculum related to each age group. Other schools operated mixed-age provisions. The separate provisions for younger students were more commonly seen as an early intervention strategy or approach, where needs could be identified and support put in place with the aim of reintegrating students back into their usual classes as appropriate. For older students attending separate internal provision units, a few school staff interviewees held the view that challenging behaviour was more entrenched, particularly later in Key Stage 4, and believed that it was increasingly unlikely these students would successfully transition back into their mainstream class group full time before the end of Year 11. The objective of internal provision units for older students in these schools often shifted towards ensuring they stayed in school and gained qualifications to prepare them for positive future pathways.

Three of the nine schools with separate internal provision units (two with 'parallel' support and one with 'embedded' support) had units specifically to support persistently and severely absent students. There was a view from staff in these schools that these students, who often had SEMH- and EBSA-related needs, required different provision to those who might be at risk of exclusion. In two of these schools, they also had additional units to support student behaviour. One senior leader described how their dedicated internal provision unit afforded the necessary space and operational flexibility to support attendance:

It's designed to support and complement the curriculum so pupils should not be in there all of the time. It's a safe haven for them when they arrive at school, getting settled for the day and then get them into lessons. And then if they have a wobble during the day, they can come back to that space. It provides mental health reflection and is intended to be flexible and intelligent in the way it reacts to the needs of the pupils. (Senior leader)

Although several IPE schools reported that students at risk of suspension or exclusion from other local schools attended their school on a temporary basis (e.g. as part of off-site direction), it appeared unlikely that these young people would be

⁶⁰ Two IPE schools rented external spaces in the local area for their internal provision. In one case, this was due to limited capacity at the school. This school had multiple internal provision units and only one of the units, for Key Stage 4 students, was based in a rented building off site. The other school rented a space to acquire a building that was separate from the main school site.

placed in the separate internal provision unit and were more often accommodated in settings such as isolation/removal rooms within the school instead. This approach was taken to maintain the established dynamics of the internal provision units and to safeguard the well-being of the vulnerable students in those settings.

Environment and facilities in internal provision units

In IPE schools, internal provision units were usually physically separate from the general main school learning environment. In some cases, the provision was housed within the main school building, but located in a more restricted area, for example, on a separate floor or on a corridor inaccessible to the wider student body. In other schools, the internal provision was delivered in standalone buildings or mobile classrooms situated elsewhere on the school site, clearly separated from the main school facilities. Internal provision units were usually in addition to, and distinct from, other onsite facilities such as: resourced provisions often funded by the local authority and typically providing specialist support to students with EHCPs; pastoral support bases (where students could access support from form tutors, heads of year, or school counsellors, etc. for social, emotional, and/or behavioural needs); or isolation/removal rooms (often used as part of behaviour management, typically as a punitive measure).

Interview and observational data from case study schools found that in most cases the separate internal provision units mirrored elements of a typical school environment and were designed primarily to be learning spaces. A small number of units included vocational spaces (including a kitchen, motor vehicle workshop, and construction skills area) as well as indoor socialisation and meeting areas and outdoor learning and recreational spaces. Some internal provisions were specifically created as sensory spaces or had separate 'therapy rooms', which involved areas with low visual stimuli and soft furnishings providing calming, safe places for students to reduce anxiety and improve self-regulation.

Purpose-built internal provision facilities were uncommon; in most instances, existing spaces within school sites were modified to accommodate the provision. A small number of leaders expressed that they felt fortunate to have access to such buildings and spaces as they were aware that many schools had constraints on budgets to create a space as well as room to accommodate this within school grounds. A few IPE schools, which reported their separate units had been in place for several years, observed how this provision had changed over time to meet the need it was intended to support.

Many students attending separate internal provision units commented on how they valued this separation. Internal provision units provided the opportunity for students with similar needs and characteristics (such as SEND, mental health and well-being, and behaviour-related needs) to be co-located together often in smaller groups or classes compared to mainstream. This was considered beneficial for staff who could respond to the groups shared needs and also beneficial for students being with others at a similar stage, sharing similar challenges or experiences.

We had to do something for the Key Stage 4 [students in the internal provision unit], we needed to split them [from the Key Stage 3 students]. Now they're being successful. So every child in that unit this year, in Year 11 has sat examinations. They've all sat up to 7 GCSEs. What we do is separating out that that sort of childish Key Stage 3 behaviour from those where they mature a little bit more in Year 10. (Senior leader)

In the case of separate internal provision units, these were considered to give students the opportunity for a fresh start in a separate building, when they might otherwise have been excluded, while still maintaining a connection to their broader school community. Describing the characteristics and benefits of a separate internal provision facilities staff and student interviewees said:

It's set up with two small rooms, a big open space and then one office and it's got a little kitchen area, so you can make them a cup of tea and things like that. So if you have got kids that really just need a space, it's set up with couches and things. The facility means the kids feel happy and safe coming over to it because it's private. Nobody can see them going through the door and nobody knows what they're going in for because it's all done in a completely separate area. (Senior leader)

I can go in the sensory room—I just like it; it calms me down. (Student)

Number of students attending internal provision units

Where senior leaders reported the total capacity of their separate onsite internal provision units, this ranged between 10 and 20 students per school. These places were in addition to other internal (universal and targeted) provision support accessed by other students in the same school. The number of students accommodated in separate internal provision units was determined by a range of factors including the capacity of the physical space, staffing, the complexity of student need, and whether places were accessed full time/part-time or a combination of both (see 'Time spent in internal provision units' section below). The total number of students supported within internal provision units could fluctuate. For example, at the start of the academic year interviewees sometimes described how the units in their schools would typically support fewer students. Emerging needs around attendance and behaviour would become more apparent through the Autumn Term and student numbers in the units would then increase. This pattern could shift again in the Summer Term in units supporting Year 11 students as those young people spend time away from school for study leave before their exams.

Where interviewees detailed their identification and referral processes for internal provision units, students' needs were flagged through various pastoral/behaviour, SEND, and safeguarding monitoring procedures (ranging from less formal weekly head of year discussions to multi-departmental behaviour and inclusion panels) and placements were allocated where students were determined to have met a certain threshold of need. A few interviewees in schools from 'embedded' and 'parallel' support groups recognised that there might also be occasions where referrals were reactive, for example, where a young person is placed in an internal provision unit in response to an unexpected serious behavioural incident or a sudden significant change in well-being (e.g. as a result of a family bereavement).

The relatively small numbers of students in these separate provisions typically allowed for a lower staff to student ratios and smaller group sizes, compared to their usual class groups.

Time spent in internal provision units

The duration of student placements in separate internal provision units varied considerably across and within the nine IPE schools with this form of support. Some students spent a proportion of time in these units, attending for as little as a few days in a block or one day per week for example, while others were long-term placements where students remained until the end of the key stage, especially in Key Stage 4. However, leaders described placements typically lasting between half a term and a term before reintegration into mainstream. In certain cases, students might attend for an undefined period while awaiting a place at external provision or another school (e.g. as part of off-site direction or a managed move) depending on needs and circumstances. Additionally, some students accessed the internal provision unit on multiple occasions during their time at the school for example, where reintegration back into mainstream had been unsuccessful. Time spent in the units appeared to be driven by student need with no consistent differences associated between schools in the 'parallel' and 'embedded' support group.

The amount of time students spent in internal provision units each day varied across the schools and sometimes within the individual units themselves. In some schools, there were units where students spent all of their time during the standard school day in the internal provision unit. This approach appeared to be most common among the units in IPE schools where placements were driven by behaviour. In some units, students had adapted timetables spending some time in the internal provision and some time in their mainstream classes in the school (e.g. while they were reintegrating back into their usual lessons) or some time at an external provision placement (e.g. to support alternative educational pathways). A few IPE schools enabled students attending internal provision units to do so on a reduced timetable (also known as a part-time timetable) attending for fewer hours than the standard school day with their remaining time typically spent at home. One senior leader described the wide variability in student attendance arrangements in their unit:

Some of those children can be full time, some come in once a week, and some come in for an hour a day. It all depends on that child and where they are on their journey through anxiety and whatever reasons make them not want to come into school. (Senior leader)

As defined in the DfE statutory guidance,⁶¹ a part-time timetable can be put in place where the parent/carer and the school agree that a student should temporarily be educated on a part-time basis for exceptional reasons and have agreed the times and dates when the student will be expected to attend school as part of that timetable. In agreeing to a part-time timetable, the school has agreed to the student being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore, must record the absence accordingly. Interviewees did not specify how extensively reduced timetables were used for students attending separate internal provision units. However, interviews with students and parents/carers in case study schools indicated that reduced school hours were being applied for extended periods and for other reasons.

Links between internal provision units and the wider school

The extent of links between an internal provision unit and the wider mainstream setting was highly variable across the IPE schools. This variation related to the aims and purpose of the provision (e.g. reintegration or full-time/permanent placements) and the type and level of student needs. Interviewees described some units as being intentionally very separate, here young people typically remained in the provision full time and had minimal connection to the mainstream school environment for the duration of their time there. In other units, interviewees gave examples of where there were some connections between the two settings, including the occasional use of mainstream facilities (e.g. for practical subjects such as science, food technology, and physical education [PE]), some opportunities for participation in social time with peers and attendance at whole-school events (e.g. sport day). However, this depended on students' capacity to successfully engage in these environments.

Students in some internal provision units would also attend some of their mainstream lessons. Links with mainstream would often increase when students were preparing to reintegrate back to lessons full time. Some interviewees described accessing online lesson materials set for their mainstream class while in the units. Some teachers working in the main school also taught subject-specific lessons in the unit. A teacher described how this approach was implemented in their school:

Every department sends at least one member of staff, once a week [into the internal provision unit], there's a subject specialist and we have a timetable of that and they will come and work the room. They spend their time with each kid asking them what they've been doing and directing them as to as to where they can go next. (School staff)

Some student interviewees talked about attending some of their mainstream lessons and that they valued being able to move between internal provision units and mainstream spaces. The ability for students in some schools to access online learning also created the necessary flexibility for them to access support in different environments (including the internal provision unit and also at home). Students and parents/carers talked positively about doing the same work as that covered in mainstream lessons. However, this required support. If students were left alone to navigate content via the school intranet, some reported that it could feel overwhelming.

Staffing in internal provision units

While headteachers had overall accountability for the internal provision units in the IPE schools, it was common for other senior leaders (with responsibility for attendance, behaviour, inclusion, or SEND) to have management oversight of these units. Staff working in internal provision units varied but typically involved teaching staff (including some specialist teachers with additional qualifications, training, and experience in a particular area of SEND) and support staff (including higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), teaching assistants, and learning mentors). The need to maintain a constant core team of staff was emphasised to enable students to build trusted relationships, and, in most cases, the staff were based entirely in the unit. As mentioned previously, there were a few examples where mainstream teachers worked across both settings and taught subject-specific lessons in the unit. There were also a few examples of where unit staff spent time in mainstream to

⁶¹ See:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf

support student reintegration. In some schools, staff from external organisations such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and alternative providers, might deliver support and interventions in the units on an ad hoc basis.

Curriculum offer

The curriculum offer in the internal provision units varied in how closely it was aligned with the ‘mainstream’ curriculum. Some interviewees also gave examples of adapted or personalised curriculum offers in separate internal provision units, which had been developed to support the needs and abilities of groups of students and/or individual students to improve their access to the curriculum and engagement with school and learning more broadly. This included making the curriculum more manageable by reducing the number and level of subjects taught while also increasing the focus on the subjects students liked and found most relevant. This was achieved in some units through access to alternative and vocational curriculum options. The curriculum approach adopted in one provision was described by the following senior leader:

These kids need an appropriate curriculum...So all kids are studying towards GCSE for maths, English and Science. All kids are going to several other option blocks that they enjoy. So it's almost kind of a bespoke curriculum. (Senior leader)

Personalised support

Some interviewees recognised that some students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence had other needs, some of which had been identified in an EHCP. In these cases, students were often receiving highly individualised support. Although SEND support is distinct, and only sometimes related to a risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion, interviewees found it difficult to disentangle other support that an ‘at-risk’ student may be receiving if funded through other channels, because in their view, the SEND support was still an important factor in helping to reduce the risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion for that young person. School staff recognised that many of these students required personalised learning, behaviour, or attendance support plans that set out strategies tailored to their unique strengths and challenges, which can be shared with the different staff they work with to understand their support needs. One of the senior leaders interviewed described one such example:

A plan goes to every teacher that teaches that child. To give you an example of the kind of things that are on there. We'll say for example 'this child has SEMH, and he goes from zero to 60 within 3 seconds for example. [...] They're not just basic tokenistic strategies [in the plan] like, 'be kind to this person.' It actually goes deeper into what sort of vocabulary does this child like, it takes into account additional things. So it considers the SEND point of view. (Senior leader)

Some schools also tailored the curriculum to meet the needs of target groups of students, to meet their current attainment, capacity, and interests. This included reducing the number of GCSEs or formal qualifications Key Stage 4 students were expected to sit, to allow for more time on core subjects and prevent students from becoming overwhelmed. In a few schools, they had also replaced GCSEs with functional skills. For students whose needs might not be met through the standard curriculum, some interviewees also described how their schools also provided access to alternative curriculum activities or vocational learning to help identify students see the relevance of the curriculum and help maintain their engagement with school. One senior leader described the approach they had taken in their school:

We definitely drop the number of GCSEs...I've had a kid that from September that dropped one. She dropped another two by January, mentally just could not cope with sitting that many exams or attending that many lessons. So we generally then look at how many we're then taking off them, so not to disadvantage, but equally just to manage what they can do in terms of their own anxiety. (Senior leader)

Leaders in some IPE schools referred to the use of part-time timetables in some circumstances for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion in their schools. According to DfE guidance,⁶² these should only be implemented in

⁶² According to DfE guidance schools should only use part-time (or reduced) timetables in very exceptional circumstances and only for the shortest necessary period—typically no longer than six weeks. It must not be used as a behaviour management tool, and should be

exceptional circumstances, not as behaviour management tools and only for the shortest necessary period (typically no longer than six weeks). However, individual leaders had made the decision to not adhere to these timetabling requirements in order to respond to student needs. These interviewees viewed this as the lesser of two evils and a necessary step to help students attend at least a little to school, rather than not attend at all. Nevertheless, they recognised that this was not in line with the official guidance. A leader from a local authority maintained school described the process of establishing their internal provision support and explained how they had communicated with their local authority regarding the planned adaptations to ensure the provision met needs for those with EBSA:

We're in our second year now, but last year we put a huge alternative programme in place. And I went to [the local authority] when I was thinking about this programme and said 'I'm going to break all the rules that you put in place. You want them [students] in from the beginning to the end of the day. I'm just going to break it because that won't return an EBSA child [to school] and I'm going to break that. You only want me to do six weeks of a reduced timetable; it might be I do longer than that because these children need a bespoke programme that is going to work for them.' (Senior leader)

Yet other interviewees emphasised that although their schools demonstrated flexibility in their timetabling approaches as part of their internal provision offer, this was within the parameters of the DfE guidance:

[We use reduced timetables] in moderation and dependent on the context of each individual. So we do occasionally use part-time timetables, but legally you can't use part-time timetables for behaviour. So it has to be where we tie it in with, for example, if someone's mental health is really struggling or they may have physical needs. We wouldn't use it for behaviour. (Senior leader)

Students and parents/carers often talked about the use of reduced timetables as a helpful, even necessary, strategy to enable the child to cope with school. Almost always, the aim was to gradually increase the length of time they spent at school. However, sometimes the reduced timetable was permanent.

For individual students experiencing issues with behaviour and attendance, more targeted communication with parents/carers was often put in place to engage them in addressing issues. Examples included regular, sometimes (daily) formal and informal contact via emails and phone calls, as well as face-to-face meetings at school and sometimes at home, with the aim of actively involving parents/carers in identifying needs, agreeing support plans, and reviewing progress.⁶³ A few interviewees noted that parental engagement improved when communication included positive feedback, not just areas of concern, to create a more balanced dialogue. Acknowledging a student's strengths and efforts and sharing 'good news', was a strategy adopted by individual staff to demonstrate to parents/carers that the school values their child, despite their challenges. This had proven effective in one school for reducing absence, as the headteacher recalls:

They're getting phone calls from the form tutor to say, 'we really miss your child.' And 'is there anything we can do to help? We're really worried about their learning.' So the focus shifts, it's not just punitive, it's about their learning and about their success. And that has made a big impact in terms of getting parents on board and children back in [to school]. (Senior leader)

Strategies and practices that support and hinder implementation of internal provision (IPE_RQ2 and IPE_RQ3)

This section outlines the key strategies and practices that the IPE schools employed to support the implementation of their offer for students at risk of exclusion and/or persistent absence. Given the range and variation in approaches across the 18 IPE schools, the strategies and practices outlined may not represent a comprehensive list. The section concludes by outlining the key barriers that were perceived to impact on the achievement of intended outcomes. Patterns in the strategies

implemented only with parental agreement see:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf

⁶³ Sometimes as part of SEND support plan or ECHP reviews.

and practices that support and hinder the implementation of internal provision are not delineated by group allocation (i.e. 'parallel' support, 'embedded' support, and 'undefined provision') as analysis of the qualitative data showed that the groups did not appear to reflect clear and consistent groupings in practice to make this a meaningful way to analyse the data.

Across the 18 IPE schools the following key features of school support were perceived to be beneficial in reducing absence and preventing exclusion:

- early identification processes and systems;
- tailored support;
- creating a sense of belonging;
- safe and flexible spaces;
- staff skills and training;
- opportunities for reintegration; and
- engaging parents/carers.

A tailored support offer emerged as the most frequently cited key feature of internal provision. As one school leader described: *'it's all about the individual child and what's good for that individual child'* (Senior leader). Several interviewees emphasised that while the standard approaches adopted by mainstream schools work for the majority of students, sometimes they lacked the flexibility to accommodate the complex and varied challenges faced by those at most at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. Describing what they believed to be the most important element of their internal provision offer a senior leader said:

I think it's the bespoke element. So it's got to be very flexible, very bespoke, and all the kids down there [in the internal provision unit] are individuals, so they are managed as individuals because we've created that culture and everyone's different, everyone's got a different path. Whereas in mainstream school, it's almost one-size-fits-all, whereas we're saying down there [in the internal provision unit] it's 'one size fits one.' (Senior leader)

A tailored offer was described as being built on strong identification of children's needs. This ideally involved working with trusted adults in school and parents/carers as early as possible to understand circumstances and experiences so that appropriate support can be put in place. One school leader described how having a highly personalised approach underpinned their provision:

And it's all very personalised. But then again, you know, the ACEs [adverse childhood experiences] are high for these kids. And you've got to work with them, if they're saying to you 'I absolutely can't do this,' you've got to be able to listen to them....And it's about having that really close relationship with the families and working with them to work out what's best for their child.' (Senior leader)

Some parents/carers and students also emphasised that recognising a young person's unique strengths and interests was crucial for fostering motivation and their participation in learning:

They really help him focus on different types of work by using his hyper focus on that day. So he could be talking about cars that day. So they try to find something that will help him focus on the work by using cars. So I feel like it really does help. (Parent/carer)

Interviewees across all IPE schools recognised the importance of creating a sense of belonging for students at risk of persistent absence and exclusion as a crucial part of improving their outcomes. This was achieved in different ways, the most common was through the development of positive relationships between students and staff. Others described how the wider school environment played a role in fostering a sense of belonging. This included providing separate and nurturing spaces on the school site just for those students, delivering interventions within the mainstream school to help normalise

support, as well as making efforts to maintain connections when students were in separate internal provision unit. Sometimes the support put in place for students facilitated the development of helpful peer relationships. These were either friendships between students in the same internal provision unit, or with older students acting as mentors.

There were individual examples of how staff were able to work effectively with some of the most challenging students and how this was made possible through them having the skills to build positive relationships, and to manage a wide range of behaviours with kindness, empathy, and understanding. Parents/carers and students frequently highlighted the quality of staff in this regard, particularly noting how well they were able to communicate effectively with students to support them to regulate their emotions and behaviours, engage with learning, and advocate for the child with other school staff and/or with external organisations.

One young person described the staff support they had received:

If something rubs me up the wrong way, it doesn't leave my mind. It just carries on. But they [the teachers] understand. They really help. I don't get in trouble anymore in my lessons. I actually enjoy coming to lessons now. (Student)

Some interviewees reported that this was achieved through staff in their schools having relevant knowledge and understanding of the wide range of factors that can influence students' attendance and disengagement from school. This included, for example, staff with awareness of trauma informed practice and ACEs, mental health and well-being, behaviour and restorative justice, SEND, safeguarding, disadvantage and local community issues, and cultural norms/differences. Interviewees also highlighted staff knowledge and skills related to teaching and learning and the ability to make the curriculum accessible to young people with a wide range of needs. A combination of strong subject knowledge, an understanding of SEND, and a relationship-based approach was perceived to increase engagement.

She helps me with the questions and if I get like 'arrrrgh'; she says, 'it's alright...we can try that question again and all that.' She knows how to calm me down. (Student)

Some common features emerged relating to how staff were utilised and deployed that were perceived to contribute to the effectiveness of a school's approach. These included: collaboration among staff working in school SEND, behaviour, and pastoral teams; flexible staffing arrangements that allowed individuals to work across mainstream and in separate internal provision units (where these were in place); consistent staffing and appropriate staff to student ratios to enable one to one and in small group work and; the presence of senior leaders/staff in non-teaching roles to support behaviour and attendance and the coordination of internal provision support.

Staff training was highlighted by several interviewees as a key feature underpinning their support. This training was provided across a range of areas including: understanding student needs (e.g. identification of needs, SEND, mental health, ACEs, and safeguarding); behaviour management (e.g. de-escalation and restorative approaches); and relationships (e.g. attachment, trauma informed, and relational practices). Training was perceived to help staff intervene in a more understanding and informed way. A few interviewees emphasised the need to adopt a whole-school approach to training to promote consistency.

Interviewees in schools with separate internal provision units also stressed the importance of providing opportunities for students to reintegrate back into mainstream lessons where possible. Although it was emphasised that this needed to be managed carefully, through collaboration between unit staff and mainstream teachers and with support. There was a recognition that students should have time to reintegrate gradually, for example, returning to lessons where they have a positive pre-existing relationship with the teacher and for subjects that they enjoy, as this allows students to gain confidence.

All of the IPE schools reported that engaging the parents/carers of students at risk of persistent absence or exclusion was a fundamental part of their support offer. One interviewee highlighted the significance of involving parents/carers by stating:

...the ones where we've had high levels of family engagement and real clear parameters of support is where we've had our most success. (Parent/carer)

Many of the parents/carers interviewed expressed appreciation about the nature and level of communication with school staff. In instances where schools had offered support to the parent/carer and family this was particularly valued:

If I call up in a panic [and say] I can't get [my son] in today, they'll do everything they can to help me or to help him. We have regular meetings, emails, telephone calls, all of that. So, I just think they're doing everything they can with what they have. (Parent/carer)

Several parents/carers talked about the importance of two-way communication and feeling heard and understood. On occasion, this had enabled strategies, which worked at home and school to be shared and adopted to provide greater consistency of support.

Once I've explained to a teacher that [my child] doesn't see things black and white like the rest of us, then they understand. Then I say, this is what I do at home. This is what the majority of the staff do. If we all stick to the same thing, obviously it keeps him on the straight path. (Parent/carer)

However, it should be noted here that the parents/carers that agreed to take part in the IPE interviews are also likely to be among those most engaged with the school and involved in dialogue with staff.

Key barriers to internal provision achieving intended outcomes

IPE schools reported several common barriers to delivering their internal provision. Several of these were the same factors that led schools to offer internal provision in the first place, making them both drivers and barriers for implementation. Outlined below are the key barriers identified by school staff and parents/carers across the IPE schools, which have the potential to impact on student outcomes:

- lack of resources and available support;
- limited capacity/staffing;
- challenges meeting complex needs and increasing demand for support; and
- variable levels of parental engagement with school.

One of the main challenges reported by senior leaders in IPE schools was how to meet the needs for rising numbers of students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion (particularly post-pandemic) with limited resources. This placed pressure on schools' capacity to deliver the desired amount and range of internal provision.

Several leaders in schools without separate internal provision units reported that, in addition to a lack of space, financial constraints prevented them from establishing such facilities even though they would like to do so. Other leaders recognised that their limited school budget for staff costs had implications for how much internal provision they were able to provide and the number of students they were able to support. Some schools reported that they had reduced staff due to budget constraints, particularly those in non-teaching roles, which in turn had impacted on their capacity to deliver internal provision support. One senior leader described how they were faced with the difficult decision of how to allocate limited funding between maintaining their separate internal provision unit and providing in-class support for students with less challenging needs—a choice that had implications for both staff and students:

[The barrier] it's funding. I'm doing this provision to calm the school but at the detriment to those children who should have learning support assistants supporting them and also to the detriment of the teacher who has to do an even harder job in the classroom, on learning, because they've not got that support. (Senior leader)

Other leaders explained that a lack of funding was limiting their ability to deliver their provision how they would like to:

...we'd also like to have another room, that actually, students could be taught proper lessons, so they're not just sort of sat in the intervention in with the member of staff. (Senior leader)

There were also challenges in offering students a more personalised support offer, as this approach was considered to be more resource-intensive.

We sell ourselves on the fact we personalise the curriculum and I'm really emphatic that you need to be able to personalise, but it is down to facilities and staffing and therefore money. (Senior leader)

Most of the IPE schools also reported challenges supporting students with increasingly complex needs, which was often compounded by the lack of specialist support available from external organisations such as CAMHS and social care leaving school staff to manage more complex situations themselves. This meant that for some students, certain provision might not be available or there would be delays in them receiving it. This created additional pressure on school staff who might not have the necessary training, experience, or time to support needs effectively. A senior leader said:

Quite a lot of these provisions are relying on your non-teaching staff, your pastoral [staff]. We have had to make cuts. It's the existing pastoral team having to pick up more complex issues post-COVID, yet there's fewer of them. (Senior leader)

Supporting the number and range of individual need in mainstream lessons was also challenging:

I think, whilst the intentions were good, when you are a classroom teacher teaching 45 periods fortnight and you've got five different classes to remember, all of the reasonable adjustments that every single member of your classes might have, it's difficult. (School staff)

A few parents/carers and students also talked about insufficient subject-specific expertise in the specific academic or curriculum support provided in internal units. While the additional support was always appreciated, the lack of subject expertise was sometimes mentioned. For example, one student with severe absence wanted help with maths but his key worker (a family liaison member of staff) was not confident to help with maths and so this gap remained. While some students attending internal provision units also accessed mainstream facilities for practical subjects such as science, food technology, and PE, which was appreciated, when such access was not provided, it created a barrier to learning in those subjects.

We can do all the theory stuff here, but we can't do the practical stuff...So, it's a struggle when you have to do it on your own, you do the theory, but you can't practice it. The GCSEs that I'm focussing on are maths, English and food [technology]. (Student)

There was acknowledgement from a small number of families that the absences themselves compound the learning challenges. When a student is not able to be in school, they can struggle without access to regular work and teacher input.

Some of the staff in the IPE schools reported limited or variable levels of engagement from some parents/carers, particularly related to attendance, which presented a range of challenges. Without support from home, students might be less motivated to keep up with school expectations. The lack of responsiveness from parents/carers can also cause schools considerable time and effort.

Perceived impacts of internal provision for students and staff (IPE_RQ4)

This section explores the perceived impacts of internal provision. It seeks to provide an understanding of the self-reported benefits for 'at-risk' students directly involved in the provision, as well as broader impacts for schools, including for staff and the wider student body. This section concludes by outlining some of the unintended consequences of internal provision highlighted by interviewees. Patterns in perceived impacts are not delineated by group allocation (i.e. 'parallel' support, 'embedded' support, and 'undefined provision') as analysis of the qualitative data showed that the groups did not appear to reflect clear and consistent groupings in practice to make this a meaningful way to analyse the data.

Perceived key impacts of internal provision for students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion

School staff, parent/carer, and student interviewees across the IPE schools most frequently identified the following positive outcomes for young people receiving internal provision support.

- improved behaviour and engagement;
- increased attendance and better punctuality;
- better qualification outcomes and future pathways; and
- improved mental health, well-being, and social-emotional development.

Other less frequently reported impacts included: stronger relationships (with school staff, peers, and families); successful reintegration into mainstream lessons; and a greater sense of school belonging among students.

The following sections detail how the key impacts on 'at-risk' students were observed and evidenced across the IPE schools.

Perceived improvements in student behaviour and engagement with school and learning

Students accessing internal provision within the IPE schools often experienced a range of behavioural challenges, typically rooted in unmet, underlying needs. These behaviours varied from low-level disruption to more severe incidents involving aggression or violence, as well as signs of withdrawal and anxiety. In some cases, students demonstrated a combination of these complex behaviours. Across the interviewees, common examples of behaviour change resulting from the various forms of internal provision support schools had put in place included:

- Improved attitudes towards school/learning in mainstream classes and in separate alternative provision units: *'I don't get in any trouble anymore in my lessons. I actually enjoy coming to lessons now'* (Student).
- Improved self-regulation—students able to manage frustration, anger, or anxiety better: *'They've [school staff] helped me a lot with my mental health and a lot with my anger'* (Student).

These behaviour changes were said to have, for some students, resulted in reductions in sanctions, suspensions, and exclusions. A teacher working in a separate internal provision unit shared their observations about the progress of a young person they had supported:

[Name of student] was in trouble every single day from arriving in Year 7, the school have literally tried everything with him. This year [Year 11], they asked us if we would take [him] and now for the first time in his school career, he's had 14 weeks with us. No behaviour incidents, no suspensions, nothing. And it's entirely because of how he's treated—we find whatever we can [to engage him]. (Senior leader)

Improved attendance

IPE schools were aiming to support students with a range of attendance challenges through their internal provision support, including students who were severely absent. Across the schools, there were varied examples of how attendance had improved. In some cases, the impact was as simple and significant as getting students, who had been out of school for extended periods back into the school building, even if only briefly or infrequently to attend particular lessons. Senior leaders in IPE schools were often navigating the complex balance between safeguarding responsibilities and re-engaging students with education and interviewees recognised that while offering individual students some flexibility around attendance (e.g. through part-time timetables) schools could support their reintegration to school, they are still accountable for their safety and well-being, and this was something that required careful consideration.

Interviewees described how internal provision also had a role in helping to maintain good levels of student attendance when in the past it had been variable as reported by a senior leader:

Even if they've got a slightly reduced timetable, their attendance is better than them being at home, suspended. [It has also impacted on] punctuality, because they're comfortable to go in and they're looking forward to seeing their coordinators for the day rather than thinking 'I'll go for a wander around [the supermarket].' (Senior leader)

This point was echoed by a student (from a different school):

Stuff like that [appointment to speak to regular member of staff] helps me get motivated instead of just staying in bed and thinking 'nah, I can't be bothered to go to school today.' (Student)

Parents/carers, in particular, spoke of the difficulties they faced in getting their children to attend school before the internal provision support was put in place. Some described the support as a turning point, expressing a deep sense of relief. For these parents/carers, the internal provision support was often providing a place in school where their child felt safe and/or supported by trusted members of staff. Describing the impact on their child's attendance one parent/carer said:

He's getting up early. He's coming to school on time. And for a while, that wasn't the case. Like when he first started here, I did struggle to get him into school. There would be days when he didn't want to, he'd refuse. But now he really is keen to come to school and he's always on time. (Parent/carer)

Improved student skills, qualifications, and pathways

For many students across the IPE schools, internal provision had resulted in better engagement in mainstream classes. Other students had been supported to access an alternative curriculum or online learning, which were considered more manageable. There were individual examples of students working towards GCSEs and having the opportunity to progress to college or a vocational placement since their involvement with the school's internal provision, which was perceived to be unlikely previously. A member of school staff told us:

I look at Year 10, [name of student] who would have been perm[anently] excluded. She will get 7 GCSEs at grade four or above. So again, the outcomes others will get other grades maybe not as high as that. But [this student] would not have got anything [before the support]. (School staff)

Students and parents/carers also echoed this:

I've got a qualification. I've got a level 1 already, but I'm almost at a level 2 in brick laying. I've already got qualifications in bricklaying and I'm so proud of that. (Student)

His English is improved because of it. His science, he's absolutely flying, like doing so, so well. (Parent/carer)

Improved student mental health and well-being

Improvements in the well-being and mental health of students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion was the most commonly cited positive outcome of internal provision identified by both parents/carers and students. The sense of relief students experienced from having 'safe and supportive' spaces in school and available staff to discuss their issues was frequently mentioned. Students and parents/carers also talked about how the internal provision support put in place helped students to emotionally regulate and enabled them to develop strategies to do this independently.

If I've got something on my mind or I've got problems that are going on, I keep it all in. And it's like a bucket and it keeps filling up and one little thing makes me overflow. With [name of staff member] I can just let it out, so it's off my chest so I feel way better. (Student)

They've helped me a lot with my mental health and a lot with my anger. (Student)

It helps him by giving him a space to go because when it's the mainstream school it gets a bit too much. [The internal provision unit] is a bit more silent and somewhere he can just try and regulate. (Parent/carer)

Understanding the complexities and nuance of student impacts

There was a recognition by school-level interviewees that sometimes the impacts of internal provision support might not be easily observed in monitoring data and that change in students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion can be subtle but still significant. As one senior leader described:

You've got to judge those kinds of tiny wins as you look at the raw data. A kid still would be significantly persistently absent, but their attendance has gone from that to that. So you have to look again at each one of those individual cases and go 'well was there an improvement made based on what we did? Yes.' Obviously, you want to try and make that big jump, but even if it's 60 to 65% [attendance], well, they're in more. We want them to be in a lot more, but there's still an improvement by doing these things to help them get to that point. (Senior leader)

Several teachers and leaders also acknowledged that student experiences could vary significantly, even among those accessing the same internal provision support. For some students, the support was transformational, for others it was not. One senior leader reflected how the impacts of their internal provision unit were mixed:

We've had some success, but it's a mixed bag. I'd say about 50 per cent of the kids have transitioned fully back into mainstream. We still struggle to get some students in regularly. This is a long-term project—it's not a quick fix. (Senior leader)

A few school staff also highlighted that, while positive outcomes had been observed for certain students, these were not always sustained due to students experiencing persistent and complex challenges. In such cases, there was a recognition that these students would often require continuous, long-term support:

A student who does a 6–8-week intervention in [name of provision] that comes back and is absolutely brilliant thereafter, they will have relapses. They'll be good for three months, and then they'll have a relapse...because a lot of these kids have adverse childhood experiences. (School staff)

There's three on a reintegration programme. Out of those three, one will make it, one will make it for a short period of time, [but will] probably be back [in the internal provision] by October and the other one won't make it for a week. So, there's a sense of being realistic. (School staff)

Impacts of internal provision for other students in the wider school

As described in the 'How the support operates in practice' section, schools took different approaches to internal provision and there was variation in how this support was communicated to the wider student body. In some cases, senior leaders thought that most students were likely unaware of the internal provision support, for example, students might leave class for mentoring or counselling sessions in much the same way others would for music lessons or sports activities. In other ways, internal provision was more visible, operating from a separate building on the school site where 'at-risk' students spent most of their time. These differences likely shaped how internal provision was perceived and experienced by the broader school community.

Some senior leaders identified the following broader impacts of their internal provision for the wider student population:

- Calmer, more focused mainstream classrooms—for example, fewer behavioural disruptions were considered to have created safer, more effective learning environments where 'at-risk' students were placed in separate internal provision units and/or where internal provision support had led to improved student behaviour and engagement in mainstream lessons.
- Preventative behaviour effects—for example, in schools where the presence of separate internal provision units were considered to serve as a deterrent for poor behaviour.
- A more compassionate school culture—for example, where students observe that various forms of internal provision support are provided to those in need, reinforcing a positive, empathetic school environment.

- Reduced stigma—for example, where there is delivery of internal provision support across the school for a wide range of students including for rewarding positive behaviours, helps to reduce negative perceptions.

Impacts of internal provision for mainstream staff

Senior leaders generally reported that their internal provision had a positive wide-ranging impact on mainstream staff. These impacts were not confined to a particular model group. In some cases, this was attributed to there being an internal provision unit in the school, which provided a separate space for students with more complex needs. While in other cases the positive effects were linked to a broader range of support options, these reduced the pressure on mainstream teachers to manage behavioural, social, and emotional challenges in the classroom. The impacts observed by some school staff included:

- Reduced classroom management related workload—for example, improved student behaviour meant lessons were smoother and less disrupted.
- Increased teacher effectiveness—for example, where there was greater focus on lesson delivery and supporting student understanding, rather than managing behavioural issues and/or complex learning needs.
- In some schools, greater staff confidence and morale—for example, where teachers felt their concerns, particularly in relation to behaviour issues and increased student support needs were heard by school leaders and the school was taking action by putting internal provision in place.

Unintended consequences of internal provision

Several senior leaders acknowledged unintended consequences associated with their internal provision, the main being the risk of student dependency on the support, the staff, and/or the environment. A few senior leaders also felt that their schools were now experiencing an increase in students with high needs due to their strong reputation for inclusion in the local community. This placed additional demands on schools and sometimes necessitated a shift in their internal provision (e.g. to focus more on those with the highest need). One senior leader explained:

There is a critical mass where you've got disadvantage and challenging young people. There's a critical mass that will break you. You become recognised for your work—they say, 'this is a really good school for inclusion.' So social care gets on board, other agencies get on board and want to signpost children to you when actually you can only work with so many of those young people and get your balance right. (Senior leader)

A few interviewees acknowledged that the school's emphasis on reducing exclusions and their internal provision offer was perceived by some as tolerating poor behaviour. One senior leader noted that the implementation of internal provision had necessitated additional work with staff to support a shared understanding and alignment with the school's values and approach:

There was definitely tension among the staff about why these kids are getting so much support...So, we had to go on a big journey around that. (Senior leader)

Cost evaluation results

The aim of the cost evaluation was to gain an understanding of the costs associated with delivering internal provision in schools. Information around the costs of providing support to those students at risk of permanent exclusion and/or persistent absence was collected via cost evaluation proformas completed by seven out of the nine case study schools participating in the IPE.⁶⁴

As anticipated, some schools found separating the costs of supporting 'at-risk' students challenging and it is likely that they took different approaches to doing so. It is also worth highlighting that, as seen throughout the IPE, practices relating to internal provision were varied, which meant that summarising costs across case study schools in order to produce average school level or per student cost estimates would not be useful, and potentially misleading. Furthermore, case study schools' approaches did not consistently align with their internal provision group ('parallel', 'embedded', and 'undefined provision') making them unsuitable groupings for cost analysis. Comparisons between schools with and without separate internal provision units were also considered but were not feasible due to the small and uneven sample size.⁶⁵ Therefore, the aim of this cost analysis was to highlight the key costs involved with providing internal provision in terms of both staff time and financial costs.

Time costs

Staff time dedicated to providing internal provision support was a substantial cost for schools. On average, the amount of time schools reported was split evenly between time spent on the management of the support and the delivery of the support. Schools reported a wide range of total staff time to provide the provision, from the equivalent of four full-time members of staff over the year to up to 65 full-time staff members (including teaching and non-teaching staff). It is likely that this broad range is as much related to how respondents view their provision and support and the teachers involved with this as well as the actual provision in place. For example, this could be due to some schools viewing all teachers across the school as supporting 'at-risk' students at least some of the time. (Two schools reported very large numbers of teachers involved in the provision [around 30 Full-Time Equivalent].) A smaller amount of time was allocated to staff training (financial cost of training courses is described below). Examples included training for a small group of staff such as attendance ambassadors or updating specific elements of staff training when needed (e.g. on restorative justice). Some schools reported whole-school training and in-service education and training (INSET) days, including for example, child protection training, when asked about training specifically for supporting students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion (some schools may consider these as part of universal provision).

The majority of the time needed to support students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion was provided by teachers (around 40% of total time), with teaching assistants and support staff providing around a third of the staff resource. The remainder was made up of senior leaders (around 5%) and other staff such as Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and mentors (around 20%).

From the cost proforma analysis, case study schools without a separate internal provision unit for students at risk of exclusion appeared to report more staff time than those schools with such units. This could be related to larger numbers of staff being involved in providing in-class support compared to staffing separate units. In practice, qualitative data from schools participating the IPE showed that in some schools with separate units there was also significant amounts of in-class support happening alongside the separate units and it is possible that these schools did not include time allocated to these in-class activities in their proformas as they focused more on the separate units. However, it should be noted that reported non-staff costs (see 'Financial costs' section below) were significantly higher (27 times higher) for schools with a separate unit compared to those without. This was driven by spending on premises (in two schools) and external support services for schools with separate units. It is important to bear in mind that there are only two schools without separate units in the cost analysis. These schools may be less likely to report all relevant costs as they may not recognise them as

⁶⁴ Time and capacity constraints in the other two case study schools meant they were unable to complete the cost proformas.

⁶⁵ Two schools provided cost proformas without separate internal provision units; five schools provided proformas with separate units.

costs associated with students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion due to the embedded nature of the support. Schools that reported higher numbers of students at risk of permanent exclusion did not report higher staff time or higher financial costs.

Financial costs

Three of the seven case study schools that completed a cost proforma reported financial expenditure due to premises rental (two schools⁶⁶) to base their units in and/or costs for modifications to existing school buildings (one school). Rental costs were the most significant here as they represented a larger value than building modification costs and were also recurring rather than one-off costs. The average spends for the three schools who reported rental or building costs was just under £30,000 during the 2023/2024 academic year. Interestingly, premises costs were reported across schools in both the 'embedded' support group and 'parallel' support group, which may in part reflect the shared characteristics between models, as all of these three schools had separate units. Some school leaders in schools with separate internal provision units explained in their interviews that they had a pre-existing building/space on their school site (implying no additional cost) suggesting that this played a part in decisions around providing this type of separate provision for students.

Three schools also reported buying services from external providers to support students in school. Support services costs paid to external providers made up the largest cost by value at an average spend of £36,000 per school in the 2023/2024 academic year (across the three schools who mentioned this type of cost). A range of services was reported including interventions, therapy, counselling, attendance support, and specialist SEND support to students. These all took place on the school site as part of the school's internal provision offer.

Two schools reported costs for external alternative provision placements and activities. One school used external alternative provision to supplement internal provision for some students through delivering extracurricular or therapeutic activities not available in school (such as fishing). However, the second included the cost of external alternative provision placements (this was an 'undefined provision' school) and we have therefore, excluded these costs from the analysis as these costs were not relevant for internal provision.

Other costs reported included:

- training costs were included by two schools (around £2,000 per school that reported this cost) such as training on EBSA; and
- resource costs such as software for learning were also included by two schools (around £3,000 per school that reported this cost).

⁶⁶ Two IPE schools rented external spaces in the local area for their internal provision. In one case, this was due to limited capacity at the school. This school had multiple internal provision units and only one of the units, for Key Stage 4 students, was based in a rented building off site. The other school rented a space to acquire a building that was separate from the main school site.

Conclusion

Table 31: Key conclusions

Key conclusions

1. The research is unable to draw firm conclusions about the relative impact of ‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ approaches to internal provision on the probability of students’ suspension, exclusion, and/or unexplained school exit. This was the case for both the ‘at-risk’ subgroup and all secondary students analysed. In practice, the two approaches were found to vary and overlap more than expected, meaning the two groups were not sufficiently distinct to allow a meaningful comparison.
2. Similarly, the research was unable to draw firm conclusions about the relative impact of any ‘defined internal provision’ (‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ support) versus ‘undefined provision’. This was the case for both the ‘at-risk’ subgroup, other subgroups (FSM, year group, ethnicity, sex) and all secondary students analysed. As above, practices were found to overlap more than expected, meaning the two groups (‘defined’ and ‘undefined internal provision’) were not sufficiently distinct to allow a meaningful comparison.
3. The study found substantial variation in internal provision strategies within and across IPE schools, with no shared framework for how schools support ‘at-risk’ pupils. The findings suggest that internal provision took multiple forms and that almost all schools are developing their own provision, shaped by their unique ethos, context, capacity, and student population needs.
4. The IPE schools identified a range of perceived benefits for students receiving internal provision support, including improved behaviour and attendance. However, these benefits were reported to vary between students accessing the same provision, and while for some students the support was transformational, for others it was limited or short-lived, particularly those with ongoing complex needs.

Impact evaluation and IPE integration

Interpretation and discussion of the integrated findings

This study trod new ground in terms of attempting to understand and classify schools’ approaches to internal provision, an area of school provision that is under-researched and not well understood at scale. The rich data from the IPE interviews illuminates the complex and nuanced approaches different schools take to supporting students they believe to be at risk of exclusion or suspension, and to reducing persistent absence. The lack of shared language around internal provision and the varied support provided, together with IPE data suggesting that most, if not all, schools were implementing at least some support for these students indicates that this is an area that schools are each developing in their own way, responding to their context, student need and their ethos and philosophy around belonging and inclusion.

Overall, the evaluation is not able to make any conclusions about the relative impact of different approaches to internal provision for two key reasons: the study was ‘underpowered’ which means that the number of schools analysed was too small to draw robust conclusions; and the approaches used by schools were much more varied than the scoping phase suggested they would be, which meant that the groups being compared were not different enough to be able to compare them. This was the case for all of the impact analyses, including the sensitivity analyses on the primary research question. This means it is not possible to say whether the classification assigned by this study of ‘embedded’ support was significantly different to the classification of ‘parallel’ support (the same being the case for the comparison between ‘defined’ provision and ‘undefined provision’⁶⁷). It is also important to note that none of the contrasts analysed were compared to no provision at all—the IPE data suggested that all schools had at least some form of support provided to students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. However, the findings of this study should not be interpreted as there definitely being no effect of the different models of internal provision compared to each other; the lack of a significant result could be due to the study design and some of its limitations, which meant that it did not fully capture the vast range of multidimensional provision that was highlighted in the IPE (see below).

⁶⁷ At face value it appeared that some schools had no specific provision according to their survey responses. As such, these schools were initially referred to as the ‘no provision’ group in the study plan. However, the IPE indicated that there was a much more complex picture in these schools that was harder for schools (and the research team) to define and classify (see ‘IPE Results’ section). For this reason, this group is referred to as having ‘undefined provision’ throughout this report.

Schools' membership to each of the LCA groups ('embedded' and 'parallel' support) analysed in the primary research question, was based on probability rather than absolute certainty. This meant it was permissible for there to be some fluidity in characteristics between the groups. Furthermore, the evidence from the IPE strongly indicated that the schools being compared across the two groups may have shared more in common in terms of actual practice than anticipated, and therefore, the treatment contrasts may not have been sufficiently distinct in order to be able to detect a difference. Looking at this another way: based on the complex and varied combinations of provision within different schools that participated in the IPE activities, it also appears that elements of practice may have spanned the different LCA categories, rather than aligning with a single model. For example, while one aspect of a single school's internal provision might be highly tailored, ongoing and led by a senior leader, another aspect might be led by a teaching assistant and provided to a small number of students for a limited time. In summary, the IPE showed that the 'choices' evaluated were multi-faceted—bundles of different policies and practices, which were used flexibly for different students. As such they represented a range of activities which may have different impacts on outcomes. They are also situated within the ethos of the school—this may suggest other factors (outside of the defined choice), which may have an impact on outcomes not captured in the impact analysis. Therefore, the complexity and multidimensionality of schools' approaches to provision in means that it cannot be captured by a simple 'embedded' versus 'parallel' distinction.

For the second treatment contrast ('defined internal provision' vs 'undefined provision'), there was also no clear difference in impact between the groups. To understand this further, there was evidence from the IPE that the 'undefined provision' schools that took part in the interviews and visits did appear to be offering some support. It is important to note that this observation is based on the subsample of schools that took part in the IPE (n=18)—there is no additional information about support offered (or not) by the other 'undefined provision' schools. However, if this were the case more broadly across the impact analysis sample, then this may have led to a narrow or indistinct treatment contrast. It remains unclear how representative the IPE schools were of others in the study whether in terms of similarities or differences. However, given the lack of a clear difference in impact between the 'defined' and 'undefined' groups, and the wide variation of provision across the samples it seems plausible that the comparison may not have been between distinct groups.

Although the impact analysis did not find evidence of differences in outcomes between the types of provision, the IPE identified a wide range of anecdotal impacts and perceived benefits for students receiving internal provision support. These included outcomes evaluated as part of this study (e.g. attendance, suspensions, and exclusions) as well as other 'softer outcomes' (e.g. engagement with learning and well-being). However, perceived impacts were reported to vary between students accessing the same provision, for some students the support was transformational, for others it was limited or short lived, particularly those with ongoing complex needs indicating the need for tailored support. However, it is acknowledged that delivering tailored provision may be challenging for schools especially given constraints on staffing, time, and resources. There was also a perception that the outcomes were influenced not just by the support itself but by wider organisational and cultural factors that were individual to the school.

A range of barriers to implementing support for students at risk of persistent absence and/or suspension and exclusion were described by interviewees, including budget, availability of and access to resources (including physical space in the school site), staffing levels and capacity, student level of need, levels of parental involvement/attitudes of parents/carers towards school, and the quality and availability of external provision locally. Other factors influencing their provision included the ethos of the school and attitudes about what inclusion looks like, the age of the student(s), and their receptiveness to the support.

The IPE illustrated the complex tapestry of support that schools were providing students. Some of the interviewees (especially parents/carers and students) found it difficult to isolate 'internal provision' support from other support that these students may have been receiving. For example, support for SEND (often identified in, and funded by, an EHCP) overlapped with internal provision for some of these students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. This is unsurprising given that certain groups of students are more at risk of both persistent absence and exclusion, including students with SEND. School staff also described how their approach to universal provision for all students was designed with students at risk of disengagement with school in mind, to prevent escalation towards exclusions or persistent absence. Considering all of this together, it is difficult to disentangle and isolate the place of internal provision within schools' provision within a dichotomous impact evaluation.

It should be noted that some schools described practice that did not align with DfE guidance (such as longer-term use of reduced timetables). Schools often recognised that this was a departure from guidance but felt it was a necessary response in the context of trying to support specific individual needs, often after using other approaches unsuccessfully. Additional consideration to resourcing, funding and support for schools should be given by policymakers to aid staff navigating this complex area.

Evidence from the IPE suggested the following:

- There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ model of supporting students at risk of persistent absence or exclusion used by schools.
- Since students’ needs differ, accurate identification of those underlying needs is critical to tailor the school provision.
- Internal provision models need to be regularly reviewed and provision adapted to meet need—schools should consider how student progress in their internal provision is measured and tracked.
- Staff involved in internal provision need specific skills to identify need, tailor, and deliver provision. Schools should review and consider the training and support that staff need to deliver effective internal provision.

Evidence to support a ToC/logic model

Two distinct groups of internal provision emerged from the scoping phase (‘embedded’ and ‘parallel’ support) and two separate ToCs were developed to provide a visual and narrative explanation of how and why each model was hypothesised to lead to improved outcomes for students (see Further Appendix C).

Given the inconclusive results reported here, the findings from the impact evaluation did not provide any empirical evidence to support the evaluation hypotheses and to validate the ToCs. As the IPE findings showed that the schools in the ‘embedded’, ‘parallel’, and ‘undefined provision’ groups did not typically reflect the operational reality of the provision in schools, the separate pathways implied by the ToCs are unsupported. While both of the initial ToCs indicated that schools’ internal provision practice would vary depending on the range of enabling factors at the school level and wider system level and the specific activities being implemented, the IPE found that this variation was far more extensive and individualised than anticipated. IPE schools tailored inputs and activities in ways that reflected their unique ethos, context, capacity, and student population needs. The range and degree of practice identified in the IPE suggests that the original ToCs underestimated the variation in school choice and the model classifications did not map to the reality of the complex differences in each school.

Due to the complexity described and in particular the overlapping features and provision across the groups, a top-level ToC has instead been constructed to give an overview of how the IPE schools described the inputs and intended outcomes and intended impacts (also see Further Appendix C). The section on future research below discusses how subsequent studies may wish to consider approaching the development of ToCs in this area.

Limitations and lessons learned

Choices that schools make in response to complex problems such as persistent absence and exclusion may not be easy to differentiate for the purpose of a counterfactual impact evaluation, particularly one in which the choices represent multi-component approaches, are heterogenous and unique to specific school contexts, and are dynamic with no pre-defined point in time at which implementation of the choice begins and can be tailored to individual students, showing further heterogeneity within schools. As such, the type of retrospective observational study, which was the basis of this impact evaluation, may not be able to observe a treatment contrast which is theoretically clear enough to find statistically significant and practically meaningful effects, even with a large sample. Such a retrospective observational study differs to what may more typically be imagined as an ‘ideal’ quasi-experimental impact evaluation (i.e. one in which a relatively homogenous intervention or policy is implemented in a highly consistent manner across a number of schools, with a clear

point in time in which implementation begins, and with clearer control over practices among schools in the counterfactual group). Further sensitivity analysis (e.g. to better differentiate a treatment contrast, such as between schools stating they offered some type of internal provision, and those which reported 'undefined provision') may have been helpful to more fully explore limitations concerning the treatment contrast. Furthermore, the between-school heterogeneity in the primary outcome measure that resulted in the impact analysis being underpowered adds further weight to the argument that counterfactual impact evaluation is challenging here.

This is the first study to attempt the measurement of impact for different kinds of internal provision on these outcomes, so statistical power was estimated at the design stage with limited data, and the assumed parameters indicated greater statistical power than turned out to be the case at the analysis stage. The drop in power between the two stages was driven by much larger between-school variation than was estimated at study plan stage (this parameter was not available in the literature given no previous studies had used the primary outcome in this study), and a lower-than-expected baseline rate of exclusion or suspension in the 'at-risk' subset. Consequently, at the analysis stage the study was underpowered compared to the expectation at design stage, although had that expectation been met, the study would still have been underpowered to detect an effect of the magnitude estimated by the primary analysis (the aforementioned discussion about treatment contrast limitations likely being relevant to why the effect was smaller than anticipated at the design stage).

Another limitation, notwithstanding considerations about the treatment contrast, is whether surveying schools is a sufficiently precise method to understand choices, particularly when there may be some subjectivity (as indicated by the IPE findings) around schools' definitions of practices and a lack of shared language/terminology about this type of provision across the sector. It should be noted that the school survey did not define 'internal provision' (to allow respondents to interpret the term based on their own school context). This was intended to enable the research to explore how internal provision is understood and implemented in practice and to identify variations in interpretation across different schools. However, the different interpretations of the label 'internal provision' may have led to a more complex set of model groupings that it was not possible to disentangle until the more detailed qualitative and discursive data collection in the IPE phase.

While the LCA performed well to classify schools based on the survey responses (with 81% of schools being 'well classified', see 'Impact evaluation phase methods' section), this method is limited by the quality of the data itself. IPE findings suggested that survey responses did not precisely differentiate actual practice in schools even where the apparent contrast (based on explicit survey responses) should—in theory—have been clear (in the case of schools reporting some provision and those reporting 'undefined provision'). This therefore, implies that survey responses may have also not clearly differentiated between a more subtle treatment contrast (the type of provision i.e. 'embedded' vs 'parallel'), which may have limited the LCA's ability to classify schools in a way which represented actual practice. In the case of such multi-component choices, which have emerged in response to specific school contexts and needs, it would be necessary to use a much larger number of survey questions in order to fully elaborate and understand the nature of that choice. This, risks making surveys too long and complex for practical administration, running the risk that respondents will provide incomplete and inaccurate data due to the demanding nature of the survey. Alternative methods to capture the nuanced data required for classification could include large-scale interviews (with the interviews possibly supplemented/informed by school document/policy review). A key limitation of the scoping phase was the absence of a step to validate the LCA groupings with schools or the wider sector, and the impact evaluation proceeded without this. More broadly, however the findings raise questions about the appropriateness of attempting to define or categorise a schools' approach to internal provision in this way given the inherently individualised and context dependent nature of much of the support identified in the IPE.

There are further considerations about the ability of balancing methods to control for confounding variables. Where adoption of specific choices is based wholly on observable characteristics, there may be confidence in the approach as a robust method of causal inference. However, the IPE found that the school choices under evaluation were to some degree shaped by a school's ethos and culture, these factors indicating that selection of a particular choice may also be based (to some extent) on 'unobservables', not present in any readily available data, and which therefore, cannot be controlled for. It is logical to suggest that the ethos and culture of a school may have an effect on the outcomes of interest to this evaluation through a different causal pathway than that of the specific choices evaluated. As such, this represents a threat and

limitation to confidence in the impact evaluation findings, such that causality can be assumed only under quite strong assumptions (this would also be true should estimates of impact have been statistically significant).

A final limitation of the impact evaluation concerns the identification of the 'at-risk' student sample using NPD data (see 'Defining the 'at-risk' groups' subsection in 'Impact evaluation phase methods' section). It is possible that the characteristics identified as being associated with risk may have been correlated with approaches adopted in schools used to identify them. Furthermore, schools in practice may identify students at risk of persistent absence or exclusion by characteristics or other indicators that were not observable to the analysis and may also perceive 'risk' at different stages of its emergence and development. For example, one school might consider a student at risk of exclusion as soon as they start to display disruptive behaviour, whereas another may not consider this to be the case until the student has had several suspensions. The potentially different mechanisms of identifying 'at-risk' students (data driven for analysis compared with schools' various practices) may indicate that the 'at-risk' group analysed did not precisely identify the students who were the actual direct beneficiaries of a school's provision.

It is important to acknowledge that there were also several limitations of the IPE (case studies and interviews) that affect the interpretation and generalisability of the findings. First, the data was gathered from a relatively small self-selecting subsample of schools (n=18) that had already participated in the scoping phase survey. It remains unclear how representative these schools are of others in the study, whether in terms of similarities or differences. Anecdotally, knowledge from the sector suggests that there are schools with polarised views on inclusion and exclusion, (e.g. with some actively supporting and promoting inclusive practices while others might adopt more segregated approaches). However, this division was not observed in the IPE schools so the sample might not necessarily be representative in this way. None of the IPE schools that took part in the interviews could be characterised as entirely inclusive supporting all students in the mainstream setting with no distinct internal provision, nor were there any at the opposite end of the scale who said they solely used removal practices such as isolation, exclusion, or off-rolling and that did not provide any internal provision support. As a result, there is the potential for bias as the IPE schools chose to participate in a study focusing on support for students at risk of persistent absence and exclusion and therefore, may have a stronger interest in or commitment to inclusive practice. Additionally, nearly all of the IPE schools had access to external alternative provision, and the quality was mostly described as poor/variable by leaders in those schools. This could be a key driver for internal provision which may not exist in other schools, potentially making the experiences and responses of IPE schools different from other schools with stronger external alternative provision support locally. Although there are some limitations regarding the IPE, they do not detract from the finding that the contrasts being measured between groups in the impact analysis were much smaller than anticipated.

Future research and publications

This evaluation was the first of its kind, looking specifically at how secondary schools were approaching their provision in relation to students at risk of persistent absence and/or exclusion. In addition to estimating the impact of these choices, it also served to describe them, both through the scoping phase survey and subsequent evaluation phase IPE. Elaborating on the nature of these choices has helped to better understand the huge amount of variation in schools' approaches to internal provision. The IPE showed that the 'choices' identified by the LCA actually represented a range of practices, which are aligned with a school's ethos and culture, emerging in response to specific needs and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Future research could explore the longer-term impacts of internal provision support for specific cohorts of young people that may be particularly vulnerable to persistent absence and exclusion such as students eligible for FSM, students with SEND, and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller of Irish Heritage students. In addition, subsequent studies could examine the differing perceptions identified in this research where impacts appeared to vary across students receiving the same internal provision support. Such inquiry would help to better understand whether the severity and complexity of need influence the effectiveness of different internal provision approaches. Furthermore, given the finding that some schools are not adhering to established DfE guidance on the use of reduced timetables, more in-depth examination is warranted to assess how widespread this practice may be and to evaluate the potential implications for young people's longer-term outcomes.

The area of internal provision remains under-researched and not yet well understood at a system level. There is a lack of shared language or terminology about internal provision, which makes comparisons of support in different settings challenging: reaching agreement across the school sector may aid not only research but more importantly access to funding

and resources. Future research should seek to increase the sector's understanding of the range of provision and how it interacts with other elements of support (in particular through the SEND pathway). This research illustrates the importance of improving shared knowledge and understanding of what is happening on the ground in schools, before attempting to measure impact. Theory-based evaluation approaches such as contribution analysis or process tracing may be a good place to start, due to the complex nature of the provision and varied offer. Doing so may also provide the opportunity to explore how different components of internal provision interact in the context of school systems.

Future evaluations may consider incorporating longitudinal or delayed follow-up designs to better capture long-term impact. Likewise, any policy relating to internal provision must reflect realistic timelines, especially for initiatives targeting complex student needs, which may take many months or years to implement and result in positive changes for students. Given that this study has highlighted that the challenges for students at risk of persistent absence and exclusion are often complex and interrelated and that schools appear to be drawing on a wide range of internal provision strategies, future research should also focus on developing and evaluating targeted interventions that combine multilayered strategies. This could help ensure students at risk receive more consistent joined up support and enable schools to embed more effective whole-school solutions.

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Appendix A: Security classification of evaluation findings

Appendix: Padlock rating

Rating	Criteria for rating	MDES	Attrition	Initial score	Adjust	Final score
5	Design Randomised design	<= 0.2 (=0.19)	0-10% (=9%)			
4	Design for comparison that considers some type of selection on unobservable characteristics (e.g. RDD, Diff-in-Diffs, Matched Diff-in-Diffs)	0.21 - 0.29	11-20%			
3	Design for comparison that considers selection on all relevant observable confounders (e.g. Matching or Regression Analysis with variables descriptive of the selection mechanism)	0.30 - 0.39	21-30%	3		
2	Design for comparison that considers selection only on some relevant confounders	0.40 - 0.49	31-40%		Adjustment for threats to internal validity 	
1	Design for comparison that does not consider selection on any relevant confounders	0.50 - 0.59	41-50%			1
0	No comparator	>=0.6	>50%		[-2]	

Threats to validity	Threat to internal validity?	Comments
Threat 1: Confounding	High	Schools' multi-component, tailored internal AP approach is intertwined with other school-level factors and concurrent interventions, making observed differences in outcomes difficult to attribute to the provision itself. For example, as highlighted in the research, school ethos and values likely influence how schools manage internal provision and may also affect their approaches to suspensions and exclusion. This unobservable is not controlled for in the analysis. Both peer reviewers have classified this as high.
Threat 2: Concurrent Interventions	Moderate	As research shows, schools often provide multiple overlapping supports alongside the internal provision under evaluation. These additional programmes/initiatives (e.g., SEND support) may be correlated with both provision type and student outcomes, making it difficult to isolate the effect of internal provision alone. However, this is likely to be similar across both groups. One peer reviewer classified this as high, and the other as low.
Threat 3: Experimental effects	N/A - Low	Not directly applicable, as the research is not an experiment. It could also be classified as low as schools don't know how they have been classified.
Threat 4: Implementation fidelity	High	Considering the type of internal AP as the intervention, the IPE clearly shows that there is significant overlap between the two main groups and that the two groups contrasted for impact analysis are not meaningful. One peer reviewer classified this risk as high, and the other as moderate/high.
Threat 5: Missing Data	Low	No missing data. Both peer reviewers classified it as low.
Threat 6: Measurement of Outcomes	Low	Outcome was constructed from administrative data. Both peer reviewers classified it as low.
Threat 7: Selective reporting	Low	Research was registered and Study Plan published and followed. Both peer reviewers classified it as low.

- **Initial padlock score:** [3] Padlocks as the research relies on matching (balancing) design
- **Reason for adjustment for threats to validity:** [-2] Padlocks – two threats are deemed high as described above
- **Final padlock score:** initial score adjusted for threats to validity = [1] Padlock

Appendix B: ICCs and prediction model metrics

Appendix B Table 1: ICCs

Research question	Between-school variance	ICC
I_RQ1	0.275	0.105
I_RQ2a	0.470	0.002
I_RQ2b	0.260	0.060
I_RQ2c	0.614	0.036
I_RQ3	0.366	0.037
I_RQ4	0.358	0.130
I_RQ5	0.487	0.048
I_RQ6	0.105	0.055
I_RQ7	0.092	0.045
I_RQ8 – FSM	0.274	0.105
I_RQ8 – Year group	0.275	0.106
I_RQ8 – Ethnic group	0.277	0.098
I_RQ8 – Sex	0.276	0.094

Appendix B Table 2: Prediction model statistics

Model	Sensitivity	Positive predictive value
Combined outcome	4.2%	63.9%
Exclusion	0.5%	50%
Suspension	0.1%	37.7%
Unexplained school exit	9.0%	61.8%

Further appendices:

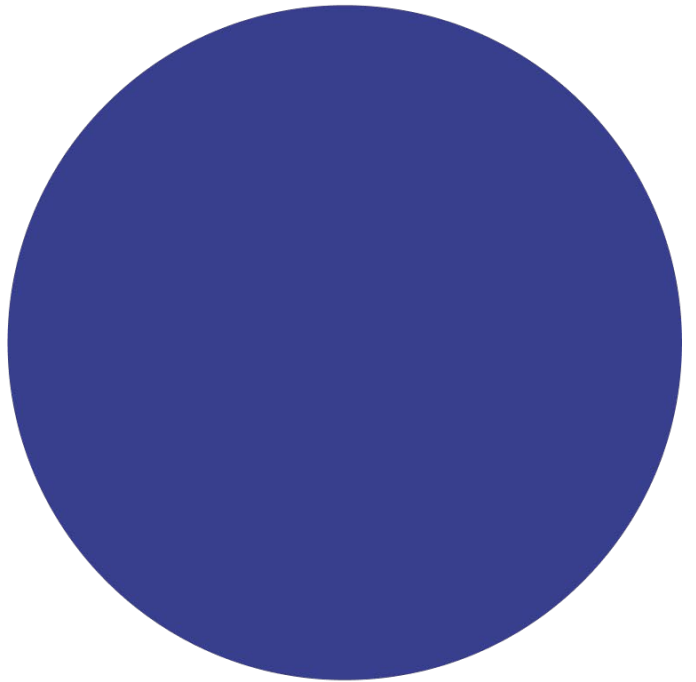
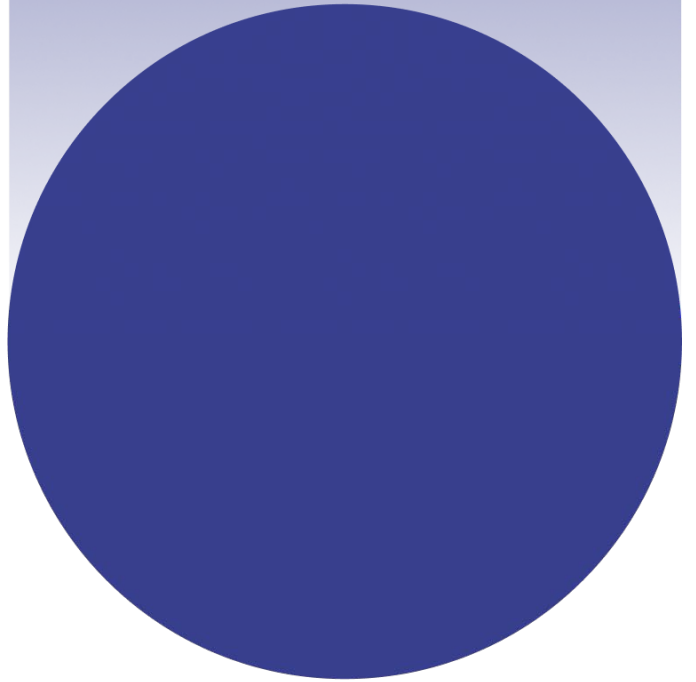
Further appendices are published as a separate document of technical notes see: **Understanding the impact of attendance - Further appendices | Education Endowment Foundation**

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