

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Context

Alternative provision (AP) includes pupil referral units (PRUs), alternative provision academies, hospital schools as well as a variety of independent, registered and unregistered settings. For permanent exclusions, the local authority must arrange suitable full-time education for the pupil to begin from the sixth school day after the first day the permanent exclusion took place. In Plymouth, ACE, part of Transforming Futures Trust, is commissioned to provide day 6 provision for both primary and secondary aged pupils.

As of October 2024 there were 35,340 children and young people in 98 schools across Plymouth including one alternative provision school, ACE and 7 special schools. During the Academic Year 2023/24 there were 114 permanent exclusions from Plymouth Schools. The number of children subject to permanent exclusions both nationally and from Plymouth schools across all phases has risen (table 1). Within these figures are a high proportion of children with SEND and/or who are vulnerable.

Table 1: Permanent exclusion rate (published data*)

Permanent Exclusions	England		South West		Plymouth		
	Academic Year	Total PEX	Rate	Total PEX	Rate	Total PEX	Rate
	2019/20	5057	0.06	556	0.07	43	0.11
	2020/21	3928	0.04	391	0.05	37	0.09
	2021/22	6497	0.08	682	0.09	45	0.12
	2022/23	9376	0.11	1002	0.13	84	0.22
	2023/24	NYA	NYA	NYA	NYA	114	0.3

NYA: not yet available (March 2025)

Like most other local areas there was a significant increase between 2021/2 and 2022/3 in the number of permanent exclusions in Plymouth. The permanent exclusion rate in Plymouth is above the national and regional averages.

The approach to reducing permanent exclusion is set out in 'Achieving Excellence', the Children's Services three-year strategic plan 2024-27. Key to this is the implementation of the Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) tool and a renewed focus on the Graduated Approach To Inclusion (GATI) which have been developed following extensive consultation with schools and settings. The Place Based Plan will be the mechanism by which both the OAP and GATI are embedded into city-wide educational practice.

Achieving Excellence also sets out that we will develop and implement a responsibility-based model of AP, bringing leaders together to develop a local system to ensure that where it is needed, children and young people are placed in high quality AP settings which meet their needs and enable them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers.

From Sept 2024 the Place Based Working Group has agreed that Reducing Pupil Mobility will be the city improvement priority. 'Mobility' includes unplanned in-year school moves, permanent exclusion, suspension, elective home education and any form of off-rolling. Pupil mobility in Plymouth is a 'wicked problem' and remains stubbornly high. Within this priority there are 6 strands which are designed, based on feedback from school leaders, to tackle the underlying causes of mobility (appendix 1). The strands with specific relevance to broadening the education offer and reducing the number of children requiring alternative provision are:

- develop school-level alternative provision across the city, alongside a strategy for effective collaboration;

- Building a pre-16 offer; and,
- addressing vaping in schools.

Key Challenges

We are experiencing an increase in the number of children experiencing permanent exclusions, particularly at key stage 3. In 2023/24, 114 children had been permanently excluded of which 63 were children in Key Stage 3. This has led to a greater number of children requiring unregistered AP placement for day six provision.

An unintended consequence of this rise has been an expansion in the number of places both in ACE, our commissioned Alternative Provision (AP) and in the Unregulated Alternative Provision (UAP) sector as the programmes of work to reduce numbers of permanent exclusions will have a lagged impact.

In 2023/24 the number of pupils accessing UAP who have been permanently excluded increased the requirement for assurance and monitoring checks carried out by the local authority. This resulted in the direction of resource away from early intervention to prevent permanent exclusion in the form of early advice and consultation with schools.

Plymouth's Local Authority Commissioned AP Provision

The statutory day 6 provision in Plymouth is provided by ACE, an Ofsted registered alternative provision school which is part of Transforming Futures Academy Trust. In Plymouth, ACE operates across 4 sites, each meeting the needs of a different cohort of pupils.

Site	Need met	Number of pupils Academic Year 23-24
Dover Road (including the community hospital education service)	Pupils with medical needs	58
North Hill	Pupils with SEMH who benefit from a small environment	37
Bretonside	Day 6 provision secondary	122
ACE primary	Day 6 provision primary	23

Transforming Futures Trust are commissioned by the Local Authority to provide 200 places across all phases to support children requiring day 6 provision and 34 places to children with medical needs.

Between April and September 2024, ACE was commissioned additionally to work with a small cohort of children who had been permanently excluded (nine children) using an outreach model in order to facilitate transition rapidly back into the mainstream school placement identified through the Fair Access process. This commissioning arrangement was put in place as a temporary measure to expand day 6 places as a result of an uplift in permanent exclusion, particularly at Key Stage 3; reflective of the national trend.

The package, delivered in the school the student was transitioning into, took account of any factors that had the potential to negatively affect a successful transition, for example, matching curriculums as well as support for any complex circumstances which may require input from a specific agency, for example, health or children's social care.

The six-week programme of support was facilitated by a full-time teacher, 3 full time Learning Mentors and a Pastoral Support Worker (0.4). The programme was additional to existing capacity and ran until the end of September 2024. Once a pupil has completed the programme, they will remain dual

registered for a further 6 months allowing for additional support from ACE. All students who engaged in the programme successfully transitioned into their next placement.

Unregistered Alternative Provision

In addition to the registered day 6 provision, during 2023/24 Plymouth City Council directly commissioned five unregistered alternative provision (UAP) settings to deliver a programme of reintegration into a mainstream setting following permanent exclusion. This was a temporary programme in order to manage an increase in Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 children who were permanently excluded whilst work was undertaken with schools to understand reasons and reduce numbers. All five unregistered provisions utilised are registered on the framework for unregistered alternative providers (held by Plymouth City Council).

In the academic year 2023/24, 24.14% (28) of the 114 permanently excluded children were placed in unregistered alternative provision for day 6 education following their permanent exclusion. This is because ACE (our commissioned Day 6 education provider) was full and unable to accommodate additional children in KSI, KS2 or KS3.

Cohort Information

Gender and age:

In the 2024/25 academic year, cohort of children and young people was split at 25% (7) female and 75% (21) male. Of this cohort, 14.29% (4) were excluded from primary schools. All 4 children were male, 50% (2) were from Key Stage 1 and 50% (2) were from Key Stage 2. The remaining children from the cohort, 85.71% (24) were in Key Stage 3 at the point of permanent exclusion. Of these 24 children, 29.17% (7) were female and 70.83% (17) were male.

Reasons for exclusion:

Of the 4 males excluded in the primary phase and placed in unregistered alternative provision, 75% (3) permanent exclusions were for a physical assault against and pupil and 25% (1) were for persistent disruptive behaviour. Of the 7 females permanently excluded and placed in unregistered alternative provision in KS3, 57.14% (4) permanent exclusions were for drug and alcohol related activity and 42.86% (3) permanent exclusions were for persistent disruptive behaviour. Of the 21 males permanently excluded and placed in unregistered alternative provision in KS3, 38.1% (8) permanent exclusions were for persistent disruptive behaviour, 23.81% (5) permanent exclusions were for a physical assault against a child, 14.29% (3) permanent exclusions were for a physical assault against an adult, 9.52% (2) permanent exclusions were for verbal abuse or threatening behaviour towards an adult, 4.76% (1) permanent exclusion was for drug and alcohol related activity, 4.76% (1) permanent exclusion was for damage and 4.76% (1) permanent exclusion was for the use or threat of use of a weapon or prohibited item.

Deprivation:

Of this cohort, 57.14% (16) children were eligible for Pupil Premium, therefore 57.14% (16) children were eligible for Free School Meals, additionally, 3.57% (1) child was recorded as from a Service Family.

Mobility:

Of this cohort, 14.29% (4) children had attended more than two primary schools, 14.29% (4) children had attended more than two secondary schools, and 14.29% (4) children had one or more episodes of Elective Home Education.

Exclusion History:

Of this cohort, 96.42% (27) children had never been permanently excluded previously, however, 3.57% (1) child had been permanently excluded once previously. Additionally, 89.29% (25) children had received one or more suspensions.

Attendance:

Of this cohort, 32.14% (9) children had one or more Child Missing Education episode and 42.86% (12) children had one or more episodes of part time timetable. 53.57% (15) children were persistently absent from school and 35.71% (10) children were severely absent from school.

Children's Social Care Involvement:

Of this cohort, 89.29% (25) children had been known to Children's Social Care in the last 6 years. 14.29% (4) children were on a Child Protection Plan and 14.29% (4) children were on a Child in Need Plan.

Special Educational Needs and Disability:

Of this cohort, 3.57% (1) child had an EHCP and 67.86% (19) children were identified as requiring SEN Support.

Outcomes:

At the end of the academic year 2023/24, all 100% (28) of the children in the cohort were on roll with a registered setting and all unregistered alternative provision packages had ceased. 53.57% (15) children currently remain with their registered mainstream school, 21.43% (6) children are on roll with ACE, 14.29% (4) children are on a dual registered package with ACE and their named mainstream school, 3.57% (1) child has moved to a specialist setting and 7.14% (2) children no longer reside in Plymouth.

Quality and Impact of LA commissioned Registered AP (ACE)

To continue to drive up quality and impact, the senior leadership team of ACE is supported by a programme of Team Around the School (TAS) meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to ensure that support targeted to ACE is informed by the on-going analysis of key performance data. Examples of how practice has developed as a result of the TAS process include the assignment of a dedicated locality member of staff, support from children's social care staff for an attendance project which saw children picked up from homes and the commencement of a monthly meeting with the SEND Service Manager to support the planning of transition for children with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP).

The leadership team at ACE report that the TAS process has helped to open channels of communication with other agencies, and that they value the time senior professionals take to wrap around the service. In particular, a range of professionals have taken part in the "Friday on the bus offer" which picks up children with barriers to school attendance from their homes. As well as targeting attendance, this partnership work has provided an opportunity to engage with young people in relation to exploitation, substance misuse and criminality.

During the 2023/24 academic year 143 children were placed at ACE. This was in line with the 2022/23 academic year (144). In this current academic year, as in previous years, the commissioned available provision at ACE and as a result of the overall increase in the number of permanent exclusions have increased our use of UAP. However, there has been an increase in the number of pupils who are placed in AP due to permanent exclusion resulting in more children accessing UAP for day 6 provision 79 (2021-22) and 82 (2023-24) which is a noticeable increase from 2021-22 (63).

Academic outcomes

Year on year, the percentage of young people achieving a GCSE in English and maths; and English, maths and Science (at any grade) has remained stable; however, over time (since 2019), the number of young people achieving a GCSE grade in these subjects has significantly increased with almost half the year 11 cohort studying both English and maths in the 2023/24 academic year.

Table: Academic outcomes at ACE

ACE Exam Results										
	Maths and English GCSE		Maths, English + Science		Any GCSE		3+ GCSEs		5+ GCSEs	
Measure	Number	% of Yr 11	Number	% of Yr 11	Number	% of Yr 11	Number	% of Yr 11	Number	% of Yr 11
2018-19	36	24.32%	22	14.86%	82	55.41%	36	24.32%	10	6.76%
2019-20	32	34.78%	29	31.52%	64	69.57%	43	46.74%	21	22.83%
2020-21	28	31.46%	20	22.47%	62	69.66%	36	40.45%	10	11.24%
2021-22	41	46.59%	36	40.91%	70	79.55%	50	56.82%	30	34.09%
2022-23	43	46.24%	35	37.63%	63	67.74%	44	47.31%	27	29.03%
2023-24	40	46.51%	31	36.05%	55	63.95%	39	45.35%	15	17.44%

Suspension

In terms of the number of suspensions the leadership team at ACE have focused on reducing the likelihood of suspensions by introducing an after-school timetable slot which lasts for one or two days. This has been used as a strategy 239 times within the 2023/24 academic year and has contributed to a continued overall reduction in the numbers of children experiencing suspensions as shown in Table 2

Table: Suspensions data

Key stage	Number of suspensions	Number of suspensions	Number of suspensions	Trend
	2021/22*	2022/23*	2023/24	
KS1	4	0	10	Increasing
KS2	45	14	12	Decreasing
KS3	281	363	349	Decreasing
KS4	313	291	285	Decreasing

In addition, with the exception of Key Stage 1, average suspension length at ACE is at the lowest point in three years. Whilst the number of suspensions at Key Stage 1 has increased, this is partly due to an increase in pupil numbers.

Pupil attendance at ACE has improved year-on-year across all key stages (table 3). This has been supported by partnership working through the Team Around the School (TAS) approach. For example, services including family support workers and youth workers have taken part in the school bus project as previously described.

Table: Attendance data

	Overall attendance	Overall attendance	Overall attendance	Trend

Key stage	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Increasing/ decreasing
KS1	75.6%	66.7%	85.2%	Increasing
KS2	78.4%	81.5%	82.9%	Increasing
KS3	63.7%	60.8%	64.3%	Increasing
KS4	59.8%	57.2%	58.6%	Increasing
KS5	N/A	N/A	90.2%	-

The table below sets out the number of pupils who have experienced a reduced timetable at any point in the last academic year. It is important to note that a reduced time timetable may have been used with a student on more than one occasion with the timeframe varying from 1 to 6 weeks. As such a reduced timetable may have occurred only once in the year and may have only lasted a week. At individual child level, 61% of pupils had one period of time on a reduced timetable. All reduced timetables are reviewed every 2 weeks.

Some of the reduced timetables were utilised as a result of specific needs in relation to the S19 outreach programme.

- Of the pupils in KS2 on reduced timetables, all of the pupils were on the S19 outreach programme (which is not full-time, to allow for medical needs, ACE are only commissioned to provide 0.5 FTE).
- 10 of the 32 pupils in KS3 who have experience reduced timetables were also on the S19 outreach programme.
- 16 of the 61 pupils in KS4 who have experience reduced timetables were also on the S19 outreach programme.

As a snapshot of who was on a reduced timetable on the 17/02/2024, 0% of KS1 were on a reduced timetable, 7% of KS2 (S19 outreach pupils only), 10% of KS3 (24 pupils, of which 9 are S19 outreach pupils) and 8% of KS4 (30 pupils, of which 12 are S19 outreach pupils).

Table: reduced timetables

Key Stage	Reduced timetables	Reduced timetables	Reduced Timetables	Trend
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Increasing/ decreasing
	Number of pupils (%)	Number of pupils (%)	Number of pupils (%)	
KS1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	Same
KS2	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	Increasing
KS3	14 (23.7%)	14 (17.1%)	32 (36%)	Increasing
KS4	63 (42.6%)	38 (27.3%)	61 (42%)	Increasing

As noted earlier, the underlying principle of the day 6 provision is to have a successful reintegration back into a mainstream setting. This is a bespoke process dependant on the individual pupil's needs. For

some pupils the transition can be a relatively swift process, whereas for others, as needs emerge, the process can take longer. For the pupils where ACE provides the day 6 provision the reintegration rates are shown in the table below.

Table: Pupils reintegrating back to mainstream schools

	No. of pupils 21/22	% of cohort 21/22	No. of pupil 22/23	% of cohort 22/23	No. of pupils 23/24	% of cohort 23/24	Trend Increasing/decreasing
Primary ACE	7	35%	6	33%	4	17%	Decreasing
Secondary ACE	7	3%	8	4%	30	24%	23/24 - Increasing – all pupils allocated at FAP getting a much better experience moving back into mainstream
ACE Health and Welfare	17	29.3%	1	0%	5	17%	Increasing

Challenges remain for the primary age cohort with the large increase in permanently excluded pupils. Several pupils are ready to move on from ACE and who have an EHCP but there is not the capacity in appropriate special schools within the city for them to be placed.

At the secondary age level there has been considerably more success with 30 pupils moving back through the Fair Access Protocol. Mainstream secondary schools were very supportive in the last academic year taking a joined-up approach to admissions and working with the families to allow for smooth transitions and ongoing support from ACE across a period of dual registration.

This is a step forward from the situation in previous academic years, which will lead to the avoidance of 'bed blocking' within ACE, increasing its ability to take and support children from day 6 of a permanent exclusion, reducing the need for utilising unregistered AP. The most significant benefit though being that the young people are able to access and engage within a mainstream school setting.

Unregistered alternative provision: city framework

In partnership with schools and trusts, Plymouth City Council have led the development of a framework for unregistered alternative providers (UAPs) which operate in the city and its travel to area. The framework was first commissioned with schools in 2019 and has recently been updated. The procurement process was completed in June 2024 and a launch event with schools, is scheduled for term 2.

As part of the retendering process, due diligence checks were performed on all UAPs currently, or expressing an interest to, start commissioning with Plymouth schools. To join the framework, UAPs were asked to complete two method statements as part of a supplier questionnaire. The questions covered themes including safeguarding practice and procedures; knowledge and understanding of illegal schools and curriculum rationale and development. The method statements were required to clearly indicate how the provision will match the expectations of the DfE where alternative education provision should:

- Have a clear purpose with a focus on education and achievement as well as meeting the pupils needs and rigorous assessment of progress;
- Offer appropriate and challenging teaching in English, mathematics and science (including IT); on par with mainstream education - unless this is being provided elsewhere within a package of provision;

- Be suited to the pupil's capabilities, give pupils the opportunity to take appropriate qualifications and involve suitably qualified staff who can help pupils make excellent progress; and
- Have good arrangements for working with other relevant services such as social care, education psychology, child and adolescent mental health services, youth offending teams, and drug support services, etc.

There are clear roles and responsibilities for identified professionals, these being the school's Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead, the Contract Monitoring Officer, Access and Attendance Officers, Service Managers and the Education Improvement Partner. Regular, fortnightly monitoring was undertaken by the Contract Monitoring Officer to ascertain, and quality assure quality and impact- this involved the provision's staff and students, checking on welfare and safety as well as progress towards the targets set for moving the young people back into mainstream school.

The purpose of a commissioned place at a UAP is to engage children with education so that they are able to transition into a mainstream school as quickly as possible. In terms of places directly commissioned by the local authority for the academic year to date, 28 children have had places commissioned at a UAP in the 2023/2024 academic year. All of this cohort successfully transitioned into a registered provider, for example, a mainstream school, by the end of the last academic year.

4. Planned Next Steps

Develop and pilot an Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce

An Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) is a workforce model which builds capacity and skills in Alternative Provision schools such as ACE. Taskforces are teams of co-located specialists, for example, social workers and speech and language therapists who are based onsite within AP schools undertaking integrated, child-centred work with pupils, responsively information-sharing, as well as sharing their expertise and embedding their practice within the whole school.

Research led by the Department for Education (Nov 21 – to date) has tested the impact of APST on pupil outcomes in 22 APs across the country and there have been early signs of its positive impact. The first impact evaluation of the model will report in 2025, followed by another at the end of the pilot, in 2026.

There is already an established 'team around the school model' in place to support ACE, and this pilot would extend and develop this model so that a range of professionals became further integrated into day-to-day functioning of the school in order to take a more holistic approach to child and wider family support as well as staff development.

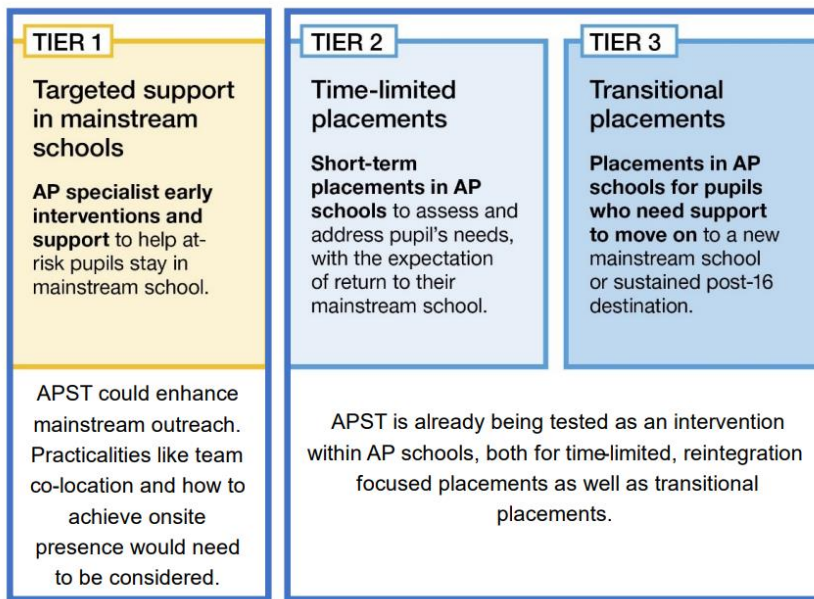
Further details of the APST model can be found at [Alternative provision specialist taskforces](#)

Develop a responsibility based model for alternative provision

A responsibility based model for alternative provision will set out the roles of each key stakeholder within a three tier model of alternative provision (figure 1). Schools in the city have a direct role to play in the development of tiers 1 and 2 and this is directly addressed through strand 1 of the Place-Based plan, 'Develop school-level alternative provision across the city'.

Figure 1

A three-tier model for alternative provision



An initial consultation with Headteachers and school leaders has been held (24 October 2024), in order to develop a detailed plan which will be developed across term 2. The consultation group is being led by an experienced trust-level leader with responsibility for behaviour and culture in a large cross-phase trust. The plan will focus on ensuring that tiers 1 and 2 of the AP system are robust in the city; specifically, that mainstream primary and secondary schools are able to develop and access a range of interventions to help pupils stay in school through professional development and practice sharing; and where needed, children are able to access specialist intervention through outreach work from ACE.

Alongside this, an Ordinarily Available Provision interactive live resource, co-produced by schools, parents and young people, is has been launched through bespoke sessions to the full range of stakeholders. This will be embedded into city practice over this academic year and will underpin the strategies and support that schools develop at tiers 1 (school-based provision) and tier 2 (alternative provision commissioned by schools).

In addition, we are trialling a preventing exclusions project led by the Educational Psychology Service in two schools, which is targeting schools that are struggling to reduce their exclusions by offering support through early consultation and planning for children who have been suspended. This work is in the early phase development and impact will be reported through strand 3 of the Local Area SEND Partnership Improvement Plan.

Actions

What	By when	Who
Write the detailed action plan for strand 1 of the Place-Based Plan	30 November 2024	Rob Williams, Place-Based Co-ordinator
Identify relevant professionals from across partners to develop the APST model at ACE schools.	30 November 2024	Jim Barnicott, Head of Education, Plymouth City Council
Write an action plan for implementing the APST trial at ACE schools	15 December 2024	Jim Barnicott, Head of Education & Martine Aquilina, Head of Service, Plymouth City Council

Appendix

Appendix I: Strands of the place based plan 2024/25

1. Develop school-level alternative provision across the city, alongside a strategy for effective collaboration

- Within the city, demand for AP significantly outstrips supply. The limited capacity of short-term AP places/support has led to an escalation in behaviours for some pupils, which has undoubtedly contributed to the number of permanent exclusions. Often children enter AP, and then fail to successfully reintegrate back into their home school setting. The aim here is to help build capacity and expertise at school-level and across the city, to provide increased early AP intervention/support opportunities for key pupils, to overcome barriers and importantly reintegrate back into normal school life. School-to-school collaboration across Plymouth will be key.

2. Develop a 'Belonging Framework'

- Attendance has failed to return to pre-pandemic levels, especially at secondary level. This is despite schools having robust policies and procedures, as well as in many cases, committing substantial additional resources. In the words of Dr Dan Nicholls *"The social contract is fracturing. A system that has powerful ways of telling children that they do not belong, playing out asymmetrically to make life precarious and insecure for far too many. A national crisis rages, children are becoming more invisible, opting out of education and they are being pushed to the edges. Those who most need school are not there, absent and missing from the very place that could offer social justice and opportunity"*. We are not going to reduce absence and EHE through simply tightening procedures or increasing the severity of fines or sanctions. A key part of reversing this trend is through re-building that social contract and creating a greater sense of belonging. The aim here is to develop a framework of approaches and strategies, utilising research and successful practice, that will support schools to build a deeper sense of belonging with children and their families.

3. Develop and pilot an early language acquisition project

- Simply put, having a large vocabulary helps children learn more. Communication and language is a EYFS prime area as it's one of the important building blocks for all the other areas. If it's not developed early, it's difficult to achieve later. Evidence shows that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds may have fewer chances to develop their vocabulary. We also know that young people, especially the most vulnerable in secondary settings, who have poorly developed language skills are more likely to be excluded and have higher levels of absence. The aim of this strand to pilot a project that identifies the most effective approaches to early language development.

4. Further develop enhanced transition

- Thoughtful transition planning between different phases can create a seamless shift, ensuring pupils and their families feel they are moving from one safe space to another. Continuity, security, and creating a sense of belonging in the new school community are crucial for long term success, especially for those with SEND. Establishing this early can support pupil attendance, reduce the risk of emotional school-based avoidance, and potential suspensions and exclusion. The cross-phase transition work has been a notable success in the city. The aim is to now build on that success to further improve the transition of our most vulnerable pupils, especially those with SEND.

5. Addressing vaping in schools

- Vaping amongst young people both in and out of schools is a national problem. Within Plymouth this issue has contributed to a substantial number of suspensions, some permanent exclusions, and even has resulted in multiple pupils being hospitalised over the last year. Incidents of vaping have even occurred in some primary settings. We intend to build on the existing work in the city around vaping, by seeking to enhance the proactive support on offer to schools to reduce the number of young people using vapes.

6. Building a pre-16 offer

- In collaboration with City College Plymouth, we aim to develop a wider pre-16 offer, that offers a hybrid curriculum for key pupils. We know that a contributing factor for some pupils in absence, EHE and even suspensions, is disaffection with the curriculum they follow. The goal is to make available a planned hybrid offer that enables key pupils to access some vocational options at City College, whilst still continuing core subjects within their home school, where they remain on roll.