Quick Guide:

Six tips to make a success of online provision

Contents

Education is complex. The challenges faced by school leaders and teachers are significant - limited capacity in children's support services, high levels of student absence and funding pressures to note a few.

So, what is needed to meet these profound challenges?

Bold solutions. And one of these solutions is online learning. Not in every situation of course, but for the right individuals and groups we know online alternative provision is already changing outcomes for young people and supporting schools in considerable need. It works, and it does so well.

In this booklet, I want to offer advice to help schools look at online as a solution to some of their most stubborn challenges – in short, what do you need to do to make online provision work for your young people who need it?

It might be online learning provision to support a student struggling with emotionally based school avoidance, a short-term solution to help turn around a student in behaviour crisis, or part-time provision to help a student in a particular subject.

Whatever the need, the following recommendations are influenced by years of experience with online learning and will help you get started.

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UK-wide provider of online alternative provision

Define your model:

Who, where, when?

As with any new initiative, consider who exactly you think it will work for. Online schooling can work for a range of students, but your needs will be unique to your context.

01.

Hybrid solution

Delivered on-site in a specifically staffed and focused unit

02.

Part-time option

Enables a student to take a subject important to their future pathway

03.

Short-term solution

For respite away from the classroom or to break a cycle of habits

04.

Upstream solution

Creates space for other interventions before students cannot remain in a physical classroom

05.

Long-term plans

Reconnect with learning and gain skills and qualifications for transition

Preparing students and families

We sometimes see schools come up against challenges because online alternative provision is a significant change for their student and parent community – and they need to be convinced that it can work.In some cases, this can be a protracted process, but it does not need to be with advance planning and clear communication.

01. **The problem**

First, focus on articulating the problem you want to solve. Then gather the people (staff) around that purpose who you know can make it work. One or two champions can make the difference. Ditto for students – understand which ones you can actually help with online.

02. **The vision**

Next, nail down that vision. How do you see it working in reality, for how long and for what outcome? Getting the who, when, where right points you in the right direction.

03. **The family**

Finally, involve the family, meet with them to make sure they understand the problem and your vision as well as narrating what you expect to happen if it goes well. You could also demonstrate what the provision will actually look like in practical terms. The more parents/carers can visualise the provision and outcomes for their child, the more likely they will understand how to support at home effectively.

Build buy-in and communicate clearly

Online is different. Families' views, informed by a very local experience during the pandemic, will be mixed.

We have had schools feedback the need to address the stigma or perception issues around online learning. Where schools assume parents/carers will understand what online "looks like" or indeed that they will be dazzled by the technological aspects or where schools presume the digital savvy of young people then there can be problems. Ultimately, you are trying to encourage a decision that involves behaviour change – to learn online. This takes thought.

To do this, work to ensure that online learning is understood for what it is. Make sure school IT support is involved to ensure student access is set up and ensure all leaders and pastoral colleagues understand the plan and can speak about it with authority and clarity. This builds a sense of purpose and avoids the risk of miscommunication.Many of our schools find that parents/carers are pro-online learning and welcome the change in student mindset that a shift in learning environment can bring. Capitalise on this and enable parents to contribute in a way that isn't overly onerous – for example by setting up the space at home, discussing their child's learning, and helping them establish good routines around breaks.

There is a useful framework to use to generate buy-in called MINDSPACE from the UK government's Behavioural Insights Team (2010). This checklist gives a steer on what influential content you might use when communicating about online learning.

- Have messages that carry authority. Gather endorsements from previous online learners to highlight impact; use evidence to back up why you think it will work for the young person.

- Explain how "normal" online is by sharing stories of other learners, ideally from your local context and explain how the child will remain connected to your school community.

- Foreground the incentives – in most cases by focusing on what the young person needs to transition to the next phase of education.

- Sensitively, express the urgency of the situation, both in terms of limited capacity elsewhere and the student's own scenario to prompt decision and acceptance.

- Finally, make it easy to get started by having answers to parent questions, supporting set up and demonstrating what the experience will look like.

01.

02.

What next?

A hurdle with online alternative provision can be the question of what comes after. Does the student transition to further online learning, return to the same or different physical setting, enter a technical qualification, work and so on?

The answer to these questions changes depending on the student and what kind of online provision they are accessing (not least whether they are full-time, part-time, or going online just for a single subject).

Where this intended destination is more ill-defined students can struggle with motivation and direction.

It is advisable to:
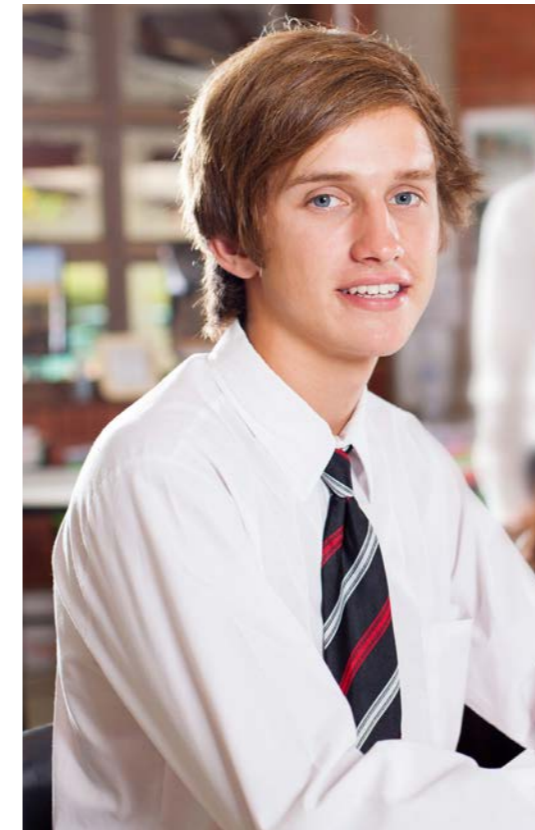
01.

Co-create targets

For the young person in terms of attendance, improvement, and attitude to learning. Do this with the student and parents/carers. Their voice is the most important and if you can frame what they say then you have the start of a common purpose that you can refer to constantly.

02.

Develop a transition plan

Where will they go next and what do they need to do to get there? Lay out a range of options and spend a little time showing what is required for each. This will help parents/carers to motivate their children at home.

03.

Assign an account leader

Make sure they are organised, know how to follow up with young people about their learning and methodical in their communications with your provider and use of your providers systems. Time spent choosing and training a leader or team for this will bring greater success

Reintegration into full-time school

01.

Where?

It is worth noting that reintegration into school full time will be the goal for many but that may not always be your setting – it could be another school, college, employment, further online learning, or higher education.

02.

Guidance

The best advice is to make sure your online students access all the same provisions that students in school should be exposed to. Make sure they meet with colleagues responsible for future pathways or careers guidance –perhaps more so than for other students to keep them focused on their goals and to keep emphasising the links to their school work.

03.

Aligning your curriculum

Ensure the online learning curriculum being delivered aligns to your curriculum, thus increasing the likelihood a student can cope when returning to physical school.

04.

Regular check-ins

Ensure your accountable leader meets with the student (perhaps online) and parents/carers regularly to review the programme and use reporting information from your provider to recognise success. The greater the students feeling of confidence in their learning, the more likely they will be to feel ready to return.

05.

Take a balanced approach

It is unlikely a full return all at once will work. Build it up via clubs, select subjects or social times. We often see that a staggered return over a few weeks, with the student continuing their online learning on school site works effective. Getting the student to design the reintegration steps with you, to own it, can be powerful.

Monitor and adapt

- Once online provision is underway, oversight is vital. Make sure your lead works with the online provider to understand their reporting platforms, agree reporting routines, and integrate this into your own school reporting – whether this be daily updates on attendance and effort to academics and submissions.

- Make use of student voice to check how your learners are perceiving the provision.

- A pitfall we see is the potential for isolation and dislocation as a student shifts online; it is very avoidable however with regular check-ins and ensuring they have connections elsewhere. But it is important to not just assume this will occur.

- One suggestion we see working is using coaching-style models or mentors for a systematic approach to overcoming barriers and developing new skills for individual students, often those who already find schooling a challenge, have methodical support that keeps them on track.

- Overcommunicate, at least initially. Check with parents, providers, other leaders on how they think it is going. Ensure everyone is updated and instructions are clear.

- Be frank about the rationale for any "mid-flight" adaptations and communicate in a measured way that does not assume people will "know" something.

- Our schools tell us that you can dial the communication down as the use of online matures into a longer-term provision in your setting – but start with clarity and enthusiasm.

About Academy21

High-quality online alternative provision for students across England and Wales

Supporting over 1,000 pupils each year, Academy21 brings students with behavioural, medical, and mental health needs a pathway to achieve strong recognised outcomes.

In a full virtual schooling environment, we are able to provide students with the flexibility, pastoral care, and education quality they need to get back on track with progress, become enthusiastic learners, and return to a mainstream classroom in the future.

Key facts…

- National Curriculum
- Key Stage 2 to 5
- Small class sizes
- Lessons from Mon-Fri
- Flexible options

Our provision is:

- Personalised to individual students' needs.

- Flexibly tailored for short and long-term requirements.

- High-quality, providing strong academic leadership.

- Safe and quality assured by numerous processes.

- Transparent thanks to 24/7 online reporting.

- Great value, with changes at no additional cost.

- Partner centric, with honest and direct communication.

- Wellbeing focused, with regular tutorials and health and well-being workshops available.

"For us, Academy21 has been invaluable in giving children instant access to education, regardless of their location.

For those students with anxiety who are unable to leave the house, the remote learning functionality facilitates these needs without compromising their learning, particularly for core subjects like maths, English, or science."

Vale of Glamorgan Council

Further information & resources

Behavioural Insights Team: MINDSPACE, 2010:
www.bi.team/publications/mindspace

Burtonshaw & Dorrell: Listening to, and learning from, parents in the attendance crisis, Policy First, 2023:
https://tinyurl.com/3nnxfja5

Corker: Children waiting years for mental health help as waiting lists spiral, ITV News, 2023:
https://tinyurl.com/etnzywx7

DfE: Policy paper: SEND and alternative provision improvement plan, March 2023:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan

EEF: EEF publishes findings from independent evaluation of National Online Tutoring pilot, 2021:
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-publishes-findings-from-independent-evaluation-of-national-online-tutoring-pilot

To get in touch, call us on **01438 535001** or email us at **contact@academy21.co.uk**

If you are interested in finding out more about Academy21 and our alternative education provision or wish to discuss the individual needs of your pupil(s), please contact our friendly team.

academy21.co.uk

Academy **21**
Alternative provision online