

High Quality Online Alternative Provision

A Guide for Local Authorities



Department
for Education

Accredited Provision

About Academy21

At Academy21 we understand that Local Authorities play a vital role in ensuring that every young person receives the education, stability, and support they deserve, especially when circumstances make traditional school attendance difficult. This guide provides local authority teams with a clear, practical overview of how **Academy21 can partner with you to deliver safe, high-quality online alternative provision with confidence, flexibility, and transparency.**

Academy21 is the UK's largest provider of live online alternative provision, supporting thousands of students across England and Wales to close educational gaps, rebuild confidence, and re-engage with learning. Our DfE-accredited programmes provide live, adaptive teaching for Key Stages 2 to 5, fully aligned with the national curriculum. We have connections with over 1,100 secondary schools across England and Wales, with some partnerships lasting 12–15 years, a testament to the confidence schools place in our provision.

Part of Inspired Education Group

We are also part of the Inspired Education Group, the world's largest group of private schools, alongside our sister school, King's InterHigh. As the UK's leading online school, King's InterHigh offers a rich full-school experience for students aged 7 to 19, offering IGCSEs, A Levels and the first fully online IB Diploma. Families and partner organisations from around the world choose King's InterHigh to provide a flexible, enriching school experience that fosters friendships, communities and collaboration.

Our schools work together to offer complementary pathways, varied subject choices and tailored support to ensure each student receives the educational experience that is right for them.

The heart of Academy21's approach

All teaching and support is grounded in a trauma-informed, relationship-based philosophy. Empathy, safety, and understanding underpin every interaction, helping learners rebuild confidence, wellbeing, and engagement with education. This approach ensures that students not only catch up academically but also regain stability, happiness, and a renewed passion for learning.

DfE-accredited, student-centred provision

Our provision is fully DfE-accredited, reflecting a strong focus on quality, accountability, and measurable outcomes. Every aspect of our programmes, from curriculum design to monitoring and reporting, is structured to give Local Authorities confidence in commissioning decisions and to ensure students achieve tangible academic and personal progress.

97%

of our students say they feel encouraged, supported and confident to ask for help.



Approved Frameworks and directories

Academy21 is listed on **more than 70 approved procurement frameworks** and directories across England and Wales. These recognised routes provide efficient, compliant pathways for commissioning our live online alternative provision, helping Local Authorities meet statutory responsibilities while simplifying the procurement process.

By being included in these frameworks, we guarantee **that every partnership is underpinned by rigorous quality assurance, due diligence, and value-for-money considerations**. Local Authorities can have the confidence that our services meet high standards of education, safeguarding, and operational accountability.

These frameworks also support **transparency and ease of commissioning**. Local Authorities can access our provision without lengthy tender processes, while benefiting from established processes that have been evaluated for compliance and performance. Our dedicated regional managers work alongside your teams to provide guidance, answer queries, and make sure that commissioned services align with local inclusion and alternative provision strategies.

We are proud to maintain strong partnerships with public sector organisations. By combining quality, accountability, and flexibility, we enable LAs to deliver timely, effective support for students needing alternative provision, confident that every service achieves real educational impact.

Our services are featured on over **70 frameworks** and directories, ensuring trusted and reliable provision for vulnerable learners.



Quality assurance

Providers like Academy21 support some of the most vulnerable young people in education. While academic outcomes matter, for many of these learners, grades are just one part of a more complex, larger picture. What they need above all else is safety, stability, and a renewed belief in their potential. That's why quality assurance in AP must be especially intentional, robust, and rooted in lived realities.

We support thousands of students across England and Wales, and nothing is more important to us at Academy21 than the quality of our provision and pastoral support. We invite others to review our service, including Ofsted and Local Authorities, who review us before adding us to their local approved provider lists. We also hold ourselves to extremely high standards across key areas such as:

1 Safeguarding and emotional wellbeing

We take a holistic approach to learning, ensuring students' mental health and wellbeing are central to everything we do. Our trauma-informed, relationship-based practices are continuously reviewed and supported through staff training and workshops. The online environment provides a secure space where students can engage at their own pace and communicate privately with their teachers, fostering trust and emotional safety.

2 Health, safety and admissions

Our online spaces are secure, controlled, and designed to be conducive to learning. Academy21's partnership-led approach ensures that every learner receives the appropriate support from the first day, with guidance tailored to individual needs. Beyond academic teaching, we provide therapeutic interventions and support that help students rebuild confidence and prepare for reintegration into mainstream education where applicable.

3 Quality of education and monitoring

Lessons at Academy21 are live, interactive, and led by qualified teachers. Our curriculum aligns with the national curriculum and is adapted for online delivery, ensuring personalised support for students to make measurable progress while rebuilding engagement and confidence. Attendance, engagement, and academic performance are closely monitored, with insights used to inform teaching adjustments and targeted interventions.

4 Measuring success and continuous improvement

We measure our impact by the progress students make. Our approach helps restore confidence, maintain educational continuity during periods away from school, and enables smooth transitions back to mainstream settings. Success is also reflected in long-term partnerships: Academy21 works with over 1,100 secondary schools across England and Wales, with some collaborations lasting 12–15+ years.

5 Embedding quality across the school

Quality is central to Academy21's culture and is embedded through:

- **Transparent policies:** All policies, including safeguarding, behaviour, data protection, and complaints procedures, are publicly available.
- **Professional feedback:** Subject leaders receive regular drop-ins, 1-to-1 meetings, and cross-departmental peer assessments.
- **Continuous professional development (CPD):** Staff are empowered through workshops, training, and distributed leadership models, encouraging cross-curricular learning and shared ownership of outcomes.
- **Examinations and assessment:** Teachers and leadership teams conduct termly reviews to ensure every student receives a high-quality, equitable education.
- **Data-driven improvement:** Daily reports on student comprehension, engagement, and effort enable real-time interventions. Schools can access these via the Mentors Portal, providing visibility of attendance, academic progress, and feedback.



Led by the chief executive officer and executive headteacher, leaders have established a culture of high ambition and high expectations. There is a driven focus on providing the best online provision possible for the pupils they serve. This extends to all aspects of Academy21's work, including the quality of teaching and safeguarding.

– Ofsted Inspection Report, 2024



How Academy21 is used by local authorities

Meeting statutory duties with flexible, high-quality provision

Academy21 helps local authorities fulfil their duty under Section 19 of the Education Act, ensuring children unable to attend school receive a full-time education. Our structured, teacher-led online programmes provide continuity of learning while supporting reintegration into mainstream settings. Vale of Glamorgan Council highlights the speed of our model, often providing login details within 48 hours of referral. This rapid access ensures learners at risk of disengagement can continue their education without delay, while authorities benefit from a cost-effective, responsive solution.



Academy21 is our primary provider of live online, face-to-face learning at Gloucestershire County Council. They have been instrumental in fulfilling our duty to provide Alternative Education Provision under Section 19 of the Education Act. In just the first twelve months of our partnership, Academy21 has played a crucial role in the educational journey and reintegration of nearly 200 pupils.

– James Saunders, Gloucestershire County Council



Short and medium-term Interventions

Managing fluctuating caseloads can be a challenge for local authorities. Academy21's flexible contract options — including Annual-in-Advance, Termly-in-Advance, and Pay-As-You-Go models — allow authorities to respond quickly to changing needs. Our innovative “seat model” ensures that:

- A student awaiting placement can access education immediately
- Seats can be reassigned when students reintegrate
- Continuity of learning is maintained despite changing circumstances

Hybrid and blended models

We operate on a partnership-first approach, working closely with local authorities to expand subject offerings, increase capacity during busy periods, and deliver specialist teaching where it is needed most. Many authorities use Academy21 as part of hybrid models, combining online and in-person support.



As a local authority dedicated to supporting the educational needs of students across our community, we have had the opportunity to collaborate with Academy21 for several months, and we are pleased to share our experience. From the outset, the company demonstrated a strong commitment to delivering high-quality tutoring services tailored to the age and stage of the students. Their platform is user-friendly and easy to navigate, both for educators and students, which has significantly reduced any initial concerns regarding the transition to online learning.

– Andrea Winestone, Head of School Effectiveness and SEND Education & Commissioning, Children's Services Thurrock



Reintegration and early intervention

Our trauma-informed approach helps students rebuild confidence, manage anxiety, and prepare for a successful return to school. Strategies include:

- Gradual exposure to academic expectations in a low-pressure setting
- Celebrating small successes to rebuild self-belief
- Developing self-regulation skills that transfer to mainstream classrooms
- Coordinating closely with receiving schools to ensure smooth transitions

Deploying Academy21 early in a student's journey can prevent the breakdown of school placements, maintain engagement, and address barriers to attendance. Local authorities value this preventive approach, which protects students' educational pathways while optimising resources and supporting reintegration outcomes.



Commissioning schools and local authorities value the quality and regularity of the information they receive about the pupils they place at Academy21. They praise the responsiveness of the service they receive. In conversation, one official told inspectors, 'I am confident that they wouldn't take on a new pupil if they couldn't meet that pupil's needs. They are not in the business of setting up a young person to fail.'

– Ofsted Inspection Report, 2024



Benefits of online provision

Flexibility for students and families

Online learning allows students to engage with education around their individual circumstances. Learners recovering from illness, managing chronic conditions, or attending hospital appointments can join live lessons when they are able and catch up later using recorded sessions. This flexibility helps maintain engagement without pressure or falling behind.

Continuity of learning

Periods of absence, whether due to medical, emotional, or social challenges, can disrupt educational progress. Academy21's live, teacher-led lessons provide structured routines and real-time interaction with teachers and peers, keeping students connected to their learning and sustaining academic momentum.

Equal access to high-quality teaching

Geography should not limit educational opportunity. Academy21 enables learners in remote or underserved areas to access the same specialist teaching as students in city centres. Lessons are delivered by qualified subject specialists who understand both the curriculum and the needs

of vulnerable learners, ensuring consistent, high-quality instruction for every student.

Scalability and adaptability

Because the provision is entirely online, Academy21 can quickly adapt to changing needs without the constraints of physical space, staffing, or location. Schools and local authorities can scale provision up or down, using flexible contract options and the "seat model" to provide access for multiple students at different times throughout the year. This removes barriers often faced by traditional alternative provision, such as limited places or capacity issues.

Building relationships in a safe, supportive environment

Online provision can also foster strong relationships between teachers and students.

Academy21's trauma-informed approach encourages teachers to use interactive tools, personalised feedback, and consistent support to create trust and engagement. The online environment provides psychological safety, helping learners gradually rebuild confidence and re-engage with education.

The students we support

Students with medical or mental health needs

For learners undergoing treatment or managing chronic conditions, regular school attendance can be challenging. Academy21's online provision offers flexible learning that adapts around hospital appointments, energy levels, and recovery periods, ensuring continuity in education without compromising wellbeing.

Students experiencing Emotionally Based School

Traditional classrooms can feel overwhelming for students with EBSA. Our online environment provides a gentle, structured pathway back into learning, starting with manageable engagement and gradually building confidence at a pace that suits each individual.

Students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

Mainstream classrooms can sometimes be overwhelming for students with SEND. Small-group online lessons, reduced sensory stimulation, and teaching tailored to individual learning styles help these learners engage meaningfully and make progress in a supportive setting.

Young people experiencing trauma or social difficulties

For learners who have struggled with social interactions or have experienced trauma, traditional classrooms can trigger anxiety or withdrawal. Academy21 provides a predictable, nurturing environment that reduces stress and creates a foundation for safe engagement and learning.



King's InterHigh and Academy21: Supporting every need

King's InterHigh and Academy21 are two DfE-accredited online schools within the Inspired Education Group.

Both schools are intentionally distinct models, designed to address different stages in a child's educational journey. Based on our experience supporting thousands of learners from Key Stages 2 to 5, our offer is not one-size-fits-all: we ensure each student receives the right support, at the right time, in the right format.

Academy21: targeted, short-term intervention

- Specific length of placement, typically short to medium term.
- Specific subjects, delivered at flexible times, which can work alongside other support.
- Small classes with personalised support for students with additional or specific needs.
- Daily reporting to schools and Local Authorities, supporting close oversight and accountability.

Our typical learner profile includes:

- A child in need of a high-quality education, often whilst they await their next placement.
- A child with a severe absence, has been excluded or is at risk of exclusion.
- A child who needs immediate academic continuity and regular positive feedback.
- A clear goal of reintegration or transition into a physical school setting.

In essence...

Academy21 offers timely, precise interventions, combining responsive teaching with caring welfare support. It supports students to stabilise their learning, maintain progress, and preparing for a successful return to mainstream education or transition onwards without long-term disruption.

King's InterHigh: longer-term online schooling

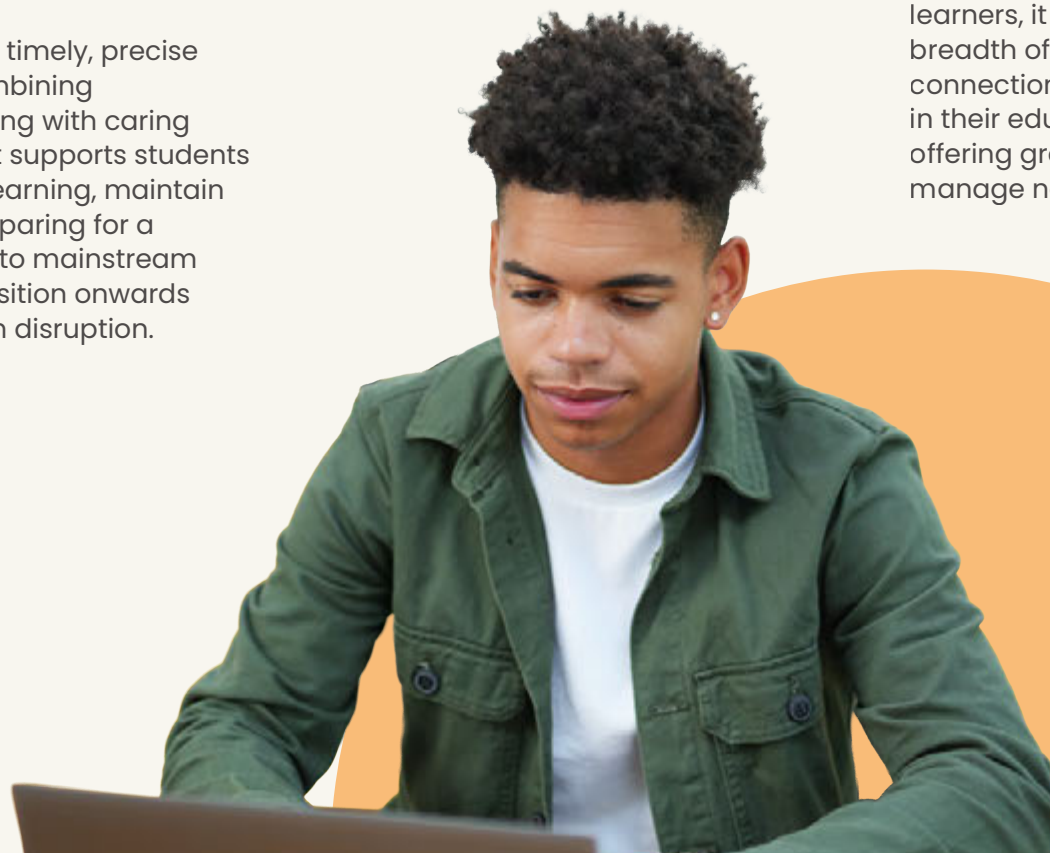
- A flexible online school environment with small classes and whole-school support programmes such as tutor groups.
- Longer term placements to complete GCSEs, A Levels and the IB Diploma Programme.
- Offers an extensive choice of subjects and enhanced opportunities for engagement and socialisation.

The typical learner profile includes:

- A child for whom online education is a longer-term pathway.
- Families seeking continuity over several years to manage need or other commitments.
- Pupils who need flexibility and understanding but still want a complete school experience.

In essence...

King's InterHigh is not a short-term intervention; it is a longer-term educational pathway. For many learners, it provides the stability, breadth of subjects, and pastoral connections that help them thrive in their education, while also offering greater flexibility to manage needs.



Side-by-side comparison: Academy21 and King's InterHigh

	Academy21	King's InterHigh
Primary purpose	Short-term confidence building intervention.	Longer-term online schooling.
Typical length of stay	Typically fixed term (often 6-12 weeks).	Usually a minimum of a year.
Learner profile	Pupils with specific needs, struggling to manage in mainstream, growing absence, excluded or at risk of exclusion.	Pupils for whom online education is the most appropriate pathway to support their needs or goals.
Educational goal	Maintain progress, build confidence and support reintegration or transition.	Build confidence and support future aspirations through a complete, high-quality school experience online.
Curriculum model	Specific subjects only, chosen by the LA or school.	Broad curriculum, with a package of subjects studied.
Timetabling	Flexible subject-level scheduling.	Structured school timetable with different options.
Pastoral support	Targeted welfare support in every class.	Wraparound pastoral support, for example with a tutor group.
Relationship with physical schools	Works alongside schools to enable reintegration.	Operates as the child's main school.
Curriculum offer	Key Stages 2 to 4, including functional skills qualifications, Enhanced Services for wellbeing and academic support , and dedicated programmes like GCSE Boosters .	Key Stages 2 to 5, with two pathways at Key Stage 5 (A-Levels and IB Diploma Programme), along with Enhanced Support Services available across the school.

Our safeguarding approach

Academy21's safeguarding approach aligns with the latest Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance.

Safe teacher recruitment:

Safeguarding begins before a student enters their first lesson, with safer recruitment practices that ensure every member of staff has been thoroughly vetted. This includes rigorous background checks, in-depth interviews, and ongoing professional development to maintain the highest standards of care and vigilance.

Safe online environment:

All learning takes place within a secure, closed platform designed specifically for education. Real-time monitoring of classroom interactions, appropriate content filtering, and clear boundaries between educational and social spaces create a safe and predictable learning environment. Lessons are recorded and auditable, strengthening accountability and enabling authorised staff to review sessions when needed.

Designated safeguarding expertise:

We have a Designated Safeguarding Lead on site to oversee all our safeguarding practices, provide guidance for teaching and support staff, and act as the first point of contact for any concerns. Staff are trained to identify signs of risk, understand online harms, and respond appropriately and promptly.

Partnership-led protection:

Academy21 works closely with schools, local authorities, and parents to ensure that concerns are handled swiftly and appropriately. Our escalation protocols provide a clear, structured process for responding to issues: teachers flag concerns to our Designated Safeguarding Leads, who assess the situation and initiate timely communication with the student's school or local authority.

Safeguarding literacy:

Alongside safeguarding and monitoring, students are supported to build safe digital habits through clear behaviour expectations and acceptable-use guidelines. This reinforces responsible online conduct and helps learners navigate risks confidently and appropriately.



A significant strength of Academy21 is the strategic direction, focus and oversight of the executive teams at Inspired Education. There are very high levels of accountability, alongside similar levels of support. Central teams, including, for example, experts in safeguarding, finance, technological development and curriculum, provide additional expertise to support ongoing improvements.

– Ofsted Inspection Report, 2024



Step-by-step view of our commissioning process

Academy21 works with over 100 Local Authorities across England and Wales to support students when they need it the most. As part of our efforts to provide the right support at the right time, we make sure that the commissioning process is as easy, transparent and effective as possible. **The journey typically follows these steps:**

1. Initial consultation:

We start with a conversation about specific student and school needs, challenges, and priorities, to get a deep understanding of the circumstances and support needed.

2. Need assessment:

Together, we identify the number of students requiring support, their educational needs, and any specific requirements around curriculum, timetabling, or further wellbeing support, as well as any local inclusion policies and priorities we need to consider.

3. Solution design:

Our team develops a tailored proposal that matches these needs and guides you through the process. We also provide you with all the necessary documentation for quality assurance.

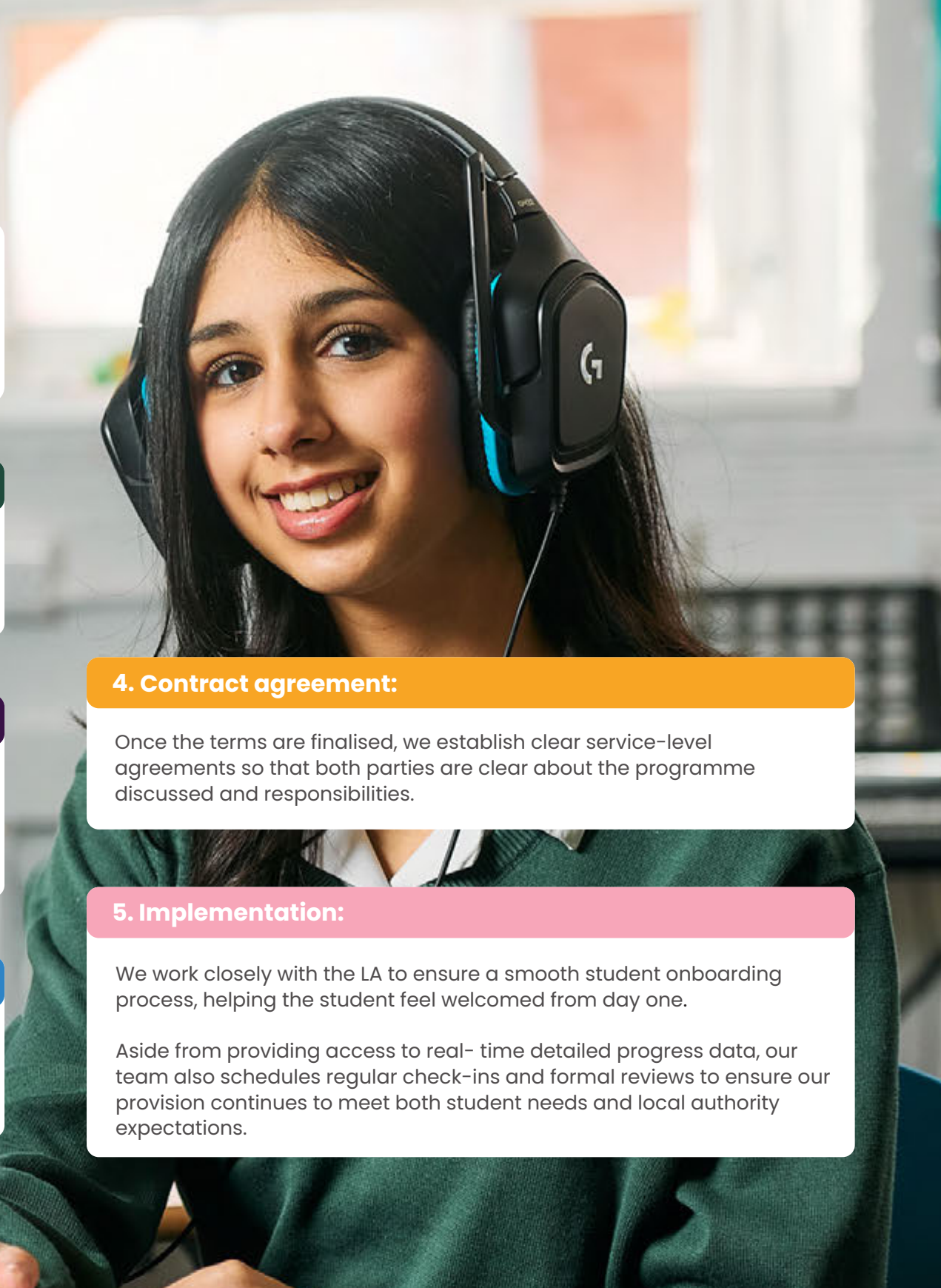
4. Contract agreement:

Once the terms are finalised, we establish clear service-level agreements so that both parties are clear about the programme discussed and responsibilities.

5. Implementation:

We work closely with the LA to ensure a smooth student onboarding process, helping the student feel welcomed from day one.

Aside from providing access to real-time detailed progress data, our team also schedules regular check-ins and formal reviews to ensure our provision continues to meet both student needs and local authority expectations.



Our commissioning options

We understand that students' needs can change rapidly. That's why we've developed commissioning options that offer genuine flexibility without compromising on quality. Local authorities can choose from:

Annual-in-Advance: Secure places for the full academic year

Termly-in-Advance: Commit term by term

Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG): Access provision exactly when needed

Our previously mentioned innovative "seat model" allows LAs to swap pupils into purchased seats throughout the year, providing exceptional flexibility for managing changing cohorts. Our Pay As You Go (PAYG) model is designed to give local authorities maximum flexibility when managing complex, changing caseloads.

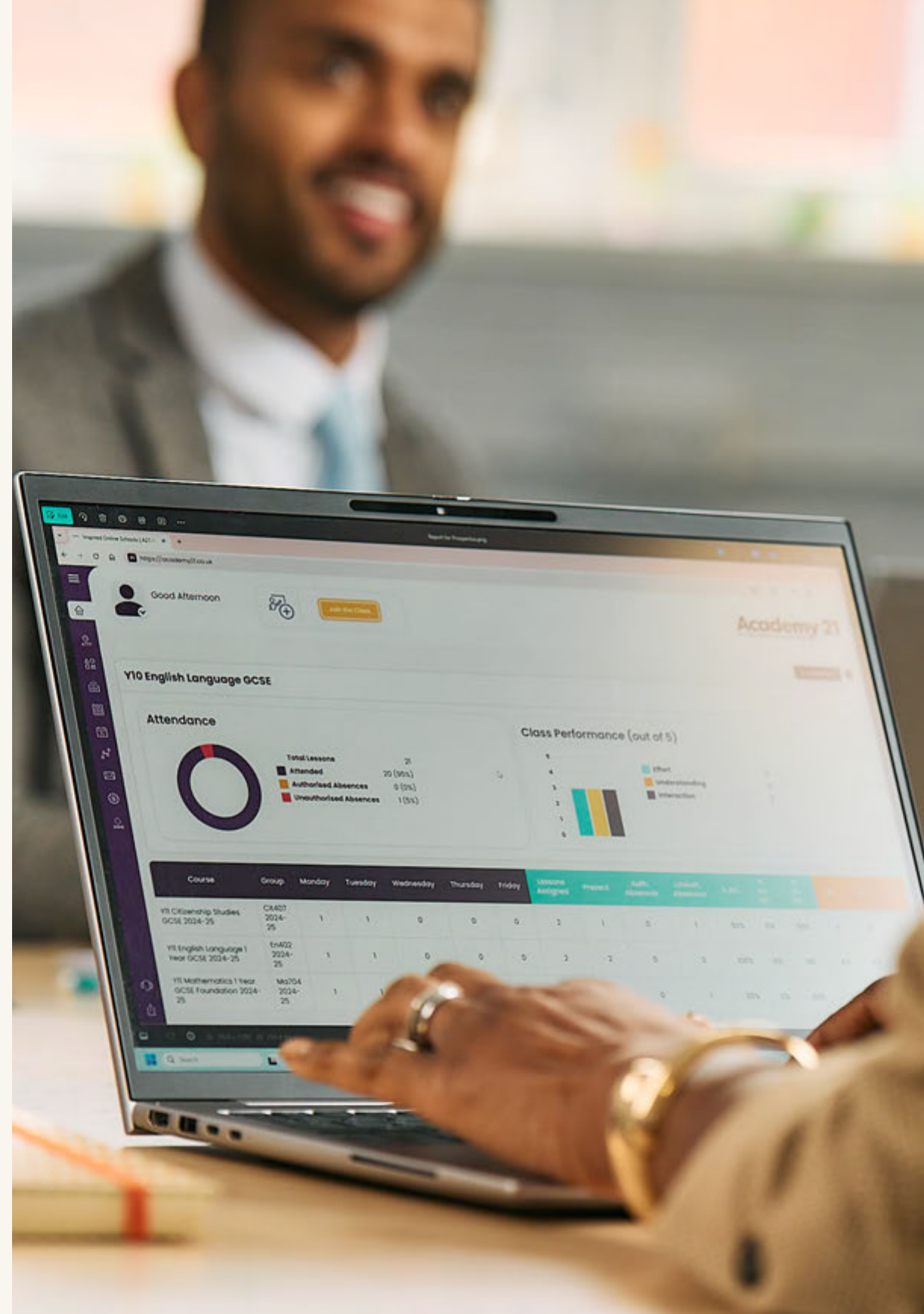
How Academy21 collaborates with LAs and schools

Academy21 works closely with local authorities and schools to support inclusion and promote pupil progress. By offering a stable and accountable online provision, we help maintain engagement for students who may struggle in mainstream settings, while reducing disruption to the wider school community.

Our platform provides comprehensive reporting and monitoring tools, giving partners visibility of attendance, engagement, and academic outcomes in real time. This transparency allows local authorities and schools to make informed decisions and respond promptly to any emerging concerns.

Collaborative data-sharing underpins reintegration or onward planning, ensuring that every young person has a clear pathway, whether returning to mainstream education, continuing in a blended model, or accessing longer-term alternative provision. Academy21 also offers professional development and trauma-informed practice training to school and LA staff, strengthening capacity to support vulnerable learners.

Through these partnerships, local authorities and schools have seen measurable impact, from improved engagement and wellbeing to successful reintegration.



Strengthening Local Authority provision

Academy21 works closely with local authorities to provide reliable, high-quality education for pupils who cannot attend mainstream school. Our approach is designed to support statutory responsibilities, ensure continuity of learning, and offer clear oversight through robust safeguarding, attendance tracking, and measurable academic progress.

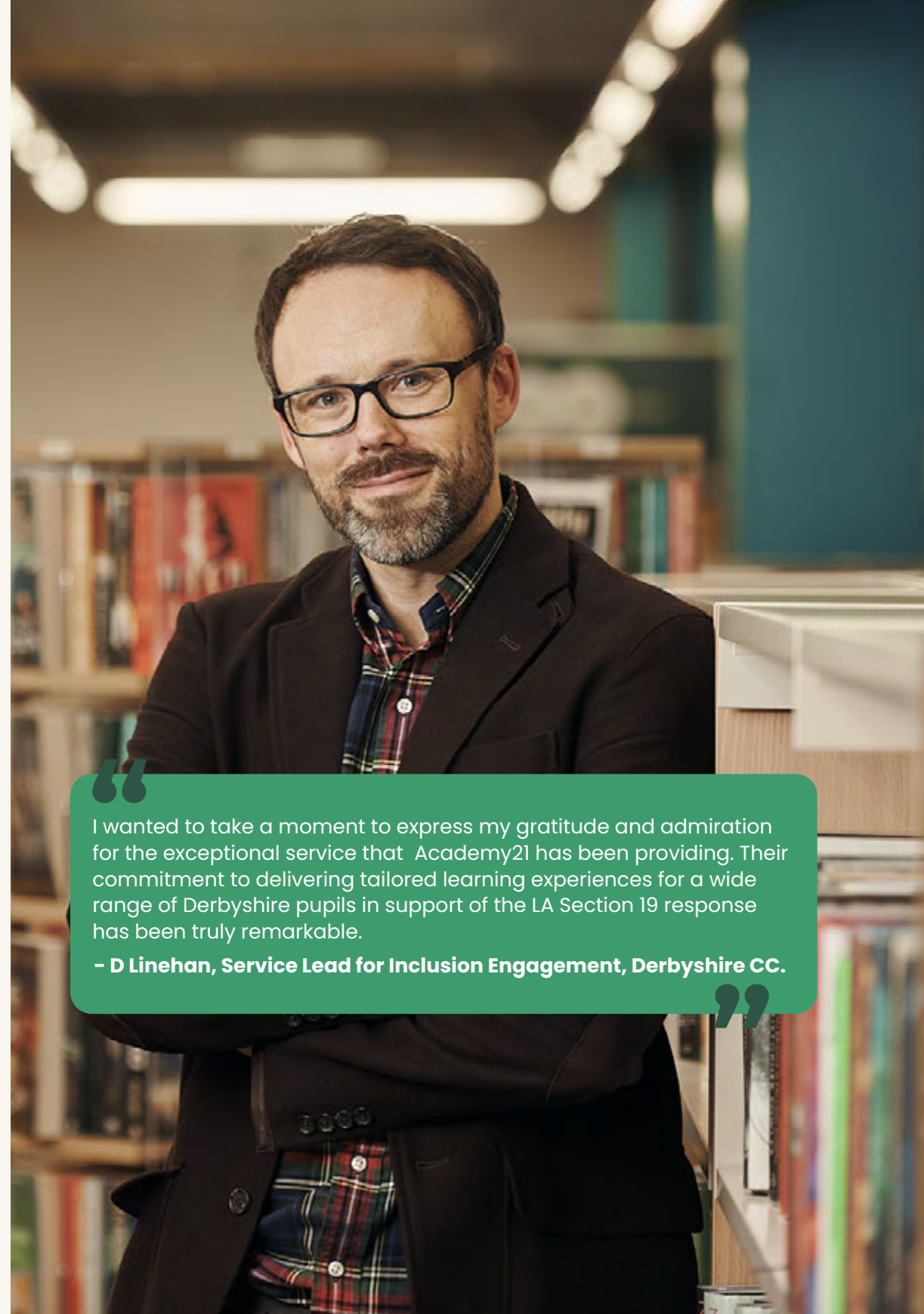
We recognise the pressures facing local authorities today, from rising levels of SEND and increasingly complex casework, to the ongoing challenge of securing consistent, high-quality provision across diverse settings. That's why we are committed to offering a stable, transparent, and accountable option that supports engagement, reduces disruption, and provides a clear pathway for reintegration or longer-term planning.

To discuss how we can support your local area:

 **Read our prospectus**

 **Get in touch**

 **Visit the website**



I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude and admiration for the exceptional service that Academy21 has been providing. Their commitment to delivering tailored learning experiences for a wide range of Derbyshire pupils in support of the LA Section 19 response has been truly remarkable.

– D Linehan, Service Lead for Inclusion Engagement, Derbyshire CC.