

Academy 21

The Online Alternative Provision Experts

High quality online alternative provision

A guide for education partners



Department
for Education

Accredited Provision

About Academy21

At Academy21, we understand the crucial role educational partners play in ensuring every young person receives the education, stability, and support they deserve, especially when circumstances make traditional school attendance challenging. This guide provides your team 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.



Working in partnership to support anxious learners

Haybrook College and Academy21

Academy21 works in partnership with schools, pupil referral units, alternative provision settings and others to support learners who face barriers to attending mainstream education. By combining structured online teaching with the specialist pastoral support available within specialist organisations, these partnerships help ensure young people can continue their education while rebuilding confidence in learning.

Haybrook College in Slough provides alternative provision for young people who face a range of 'barriers to learning' and are unable to attend mainstream school. The college has a varied curriculum offer to meet the varying needs of its students.

The Apollo unit is a calm, nurturing provision designed specifically for learners with low confidence, severe anxiety and other mental health challenges. For more than 10 years, Haybrook's Apollo unit has combined Academy21's online provision with pastoral support and vocational opportunities.

“

Academy21 provides a platform for learning for young people who are very disadvantaged, perhaps through mental health, illness or anxiety. We use Academy21 to deliver the core subjects, English language, maths and science.

– Julia Holder, Head of the Apollo unit at Haybrook College

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Students access Academy21 from the Apollo unit, a quiet, dedicated space within Haybrook's grounds. This set up allows students to access creative and vocational activities in the afternoons. This balance allows Apollo staff to focus on confidence-building and wellbeing support while ensuring students continued to access structured academic learning.

Julia also highlighted how the model supports learners who had previously disengaged from education:

“For many of our students, returning to a traditional classroom environment immediately would have been overwhelming. The Academy21 lessons allowed them to begin learning again in a way that felt safe and manageable.”

The programme also provided staff with valuable insight into how students were engaging with learning.

“The reporting systems are very helpful. We are able to monitor attendance and progress and use that information to support our students more effectively.”

Through this blended approach, students can reconnect with learning and begin rebuilding their confidence in education.

“It gave them a starting point. They could engage with learning again and begin to feel that education was something they could succeed in.”

By combining structured online teaching with strong pastoral support, the partnership between Haybrook College and Academy21 has helped many students begin their journey back into learning.

“We've had some very positive outcomes for students; some have gained excellent results and they've moved on to further education and also university.”



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 over 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



Academy21 in practice:

Engagement with educational partners

Academy21 works with a wide range of education providers, including Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), onsite AP settings and other specialist settings to support students facing barriers to learning, ensuring access to high-quality, flexible online education. We work closely with our clients to ensure that every student gets the support they need, when they need it.

Hybrid and blended models

We operate on a partnership-first approach, working closely with education partners and specialist settings to:

- Expand subject offerings
- Increase capacity during busy periods
- Deliver specialist teaching where it is needed most

Many partners use Academy21 as part of hybrid or blended models, combining online and in-person support to maximise educational outcomes for students.

Meeting statutory duties with flexible, high-quality provision

Managing fluctuating caseloads and responding swiftly to changing educational needs can be challenging.

Academy21 offers flexible contract options such as Annual-in-Advance, Termly-in-Advance, and Pay-As-You-Go models that enable partners to adapt quickly and efficiently. Our innovative seat model ensures that:

- Students awaiting placement can access education immediately
- Seats can be reassigned as students reintegrate into mainstream education
- Continuity of learning is maintained despite changing circumstances

93%

of our students feel more confident in their learning since joining Academy21.

Short and medium-term interventions

Academy21 is particularly useful during peak periods when capacity challenges may see students placed on waiting lists. By collaborating with us, you can:

- Free up internal resources
- Complement our high-quality academic provision with your pastoral support

Our enrolment process takes just two working days, enabling quick onboarding of new students and the immediate delivery of personalised support.

Utilising Academy21 early in a student's journey helps prevent placement breakdowns, maintain engagement, and address attendance barriers. Our education partners tell us they value this proactive approach that safeguards educational pathways, optimises resources, and improves reintegration outcomes.

Reintegration and early intervention

Our trauma-informed teaching helps students rebuild confidence, manage anxiety, and prepare for successful reintegration into their mainstream setting, or other permanent placement. Key strategies include:

- Gradual exposure to academic expectations in low-pressure settings
- Celebrating small successes to rebuild self-belief
- Developing self-regulation skills transferable to mainstream classrooms
- Coordinating closely with commissioning organisations to ensure smooth transitions





The speed of setup is impressive, and the ease of accessing lessons has made the learning process simple and rewarding for them. Moreover, the regular feedback provided by Academy21 and their celebration of student success has created a positive and motivating learning environment. Pupils have consistently reported they enjoy their lessons and look forward to them, which is a testament to the quality of education being delivered. In essence, Academy21 has proven to be an invaluable resource, not only in maintaining continuity of education but also in providing a stepping stone for pupils to reintegrate into other educational settings.

– **D Linehan, Service Lead for Inclusion Engagement, Derbyshire County Council**



We were looking for a platform that could engage young people and pitch the learning to their levels. Academy21 lessons are tailored to young people, to their level. So I've found our students are much more engaged and taking more responsibility for their learning.

– **S Ojo, Evolution Sports**



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 education partners 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.

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)

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 education partners, 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 helps students to stabilise their learning, maintain progress, and prepare for a successful return to mainstream education or transition onwards without long-term disruption.

King's InterHigh: longer-term online schooling

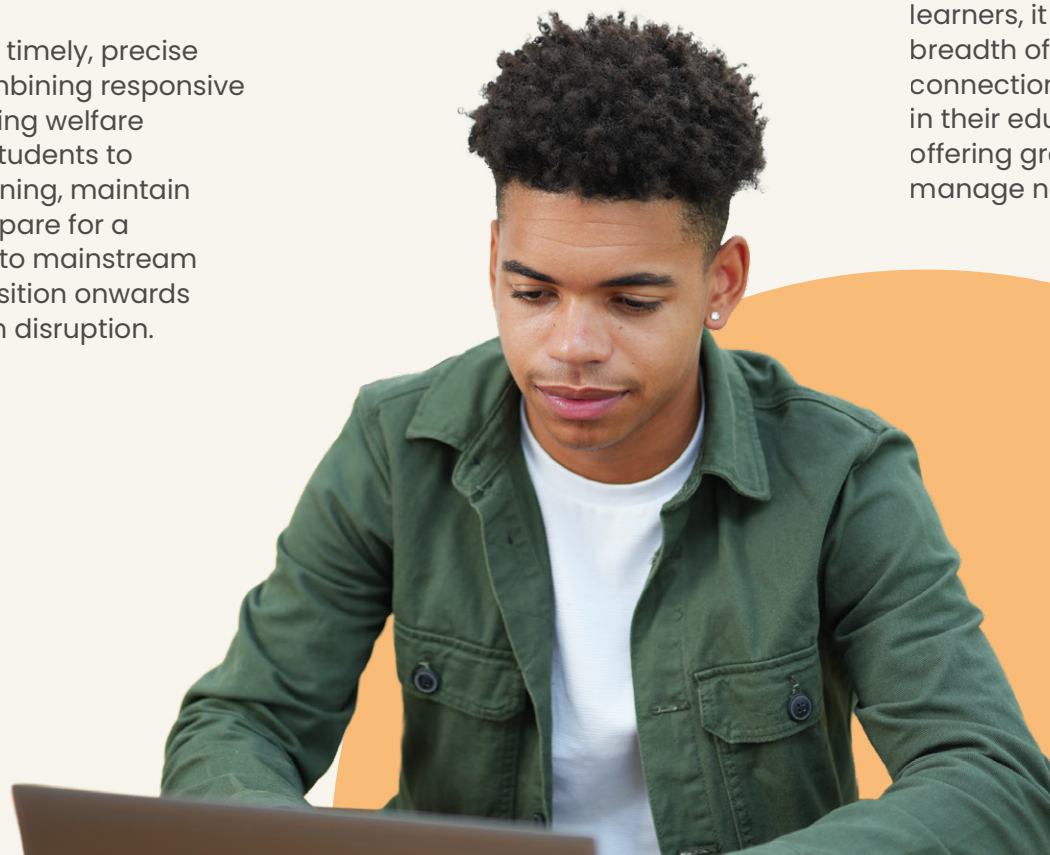
- A flexible online school environment with small classes and whole-school support programmes such as tutor groups.
- Longer term placements to complete GCSEs, A Levels and the IB Diploma Programme.
- Offers an extensive choice of subjects and enhanced opportunities for engagement and socialisation.

The typical learner profile includes:

- A child for whom online education is a longer-term pathway.
- Families seeking continuity over several years to manage needs 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 commissioning organisation 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, education partners 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.

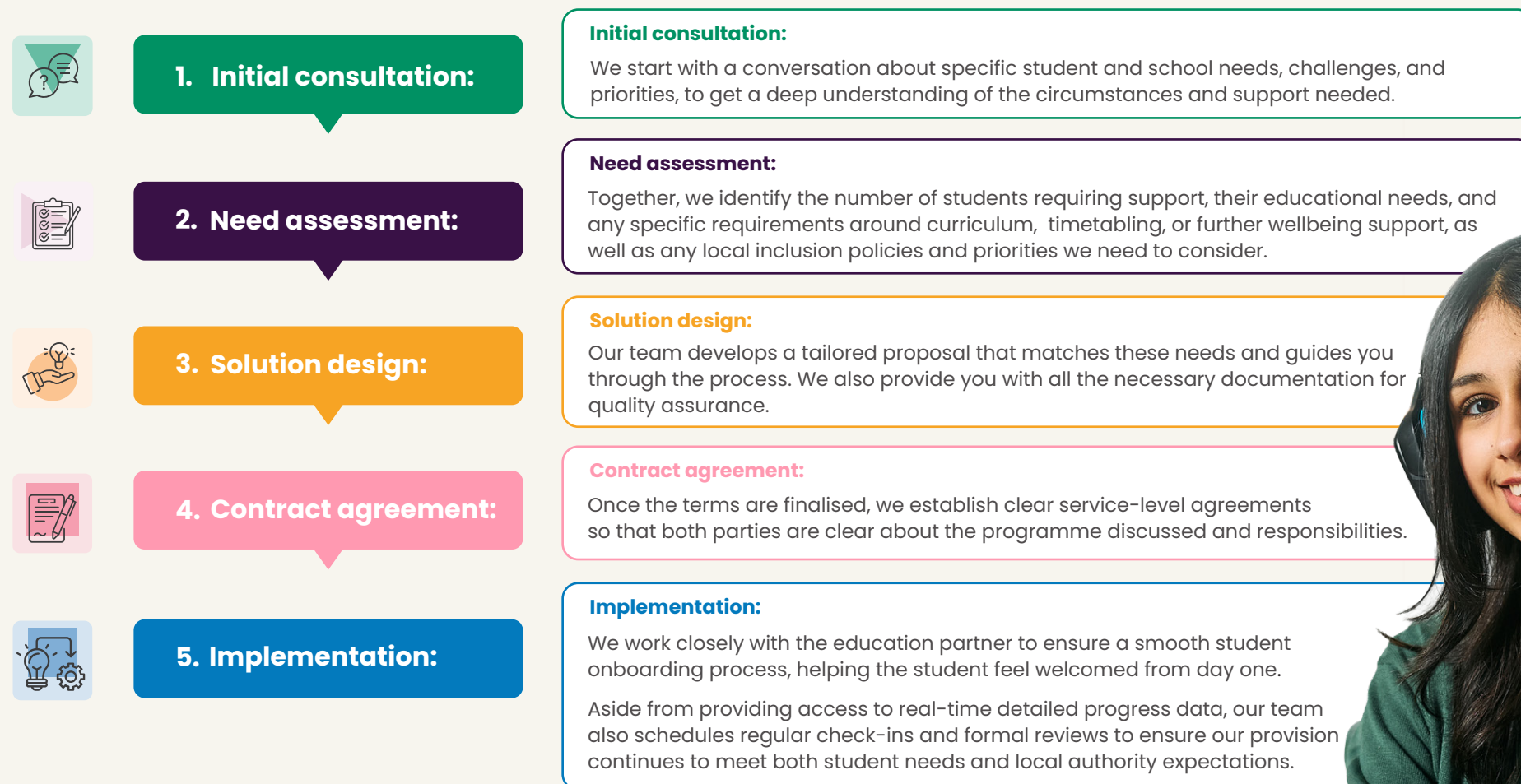
– Ofsted Inspection Report, 2024



Step-by-step view of our commissioning process

Academy21 works in partnership with hundreds of schools and education partners and supports learners across more than 130 Local Authority areas in England and Wales.

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:**



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. Education partners 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 local authorities 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 education partners

Academy21 works closely with a wide range of education providers and organisations 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 our partners 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. Through this collaborative approach, our partners have seen measurable impact, from improved engagement and wellbeing to successful reintegration.



Enhancing provision through educational partner collaboration

Academy21 collaborates closely with educational partners to deliver reliable, high-quality education for children and young people unable to attend mainstream schools. Our approach is designed to support statutory responsibilities, ensure continuity of learning, and provide clear oversight through robust safeguarding, attendance monitoring, and measurable academic progress.

We understand the challenges faced by education providers today, including rising levels of SEND, increasingly complex casework, and the ongoing need to secure consistent, high-quality provision across diverse settings. That is why we are committed to offering a stable, transparent, and accountable solution that promotes engagement, minimizes disruption, and provides a clear pathway for reintegration or long-term planning.

To discuss how we can support your provision:

 **Read our prospectus**

 **Get in touch**

 **Visit the website**

Some students, if left without support, would be at real risk of permanent exclusion. Academy21 gave us a practical, high-quality way to keep them engaged in their learning for a given period of time, and safeguard their futures.

– **Josh McInerney, Deputy Headteacher, Raynes Park High School**

