

Briefing note

Annual Report on Alternative Provision

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| Date | September 2024 |
| Purpose | This paper intends to update Schools Forum on the accesses arrangements and use of alternative education provision in the primary and secondary sector in 2023/24, the partnership arrangements and review processes in place, identified next steps, and to confirm the number of places to be commissioned for 2025/26. |

Recommendations

To note the annual report on alternative education and note that for 2025/26:

- 35 Places will be commissioned at the Primary PRU (Primary phase)
- 205 Places will be commissioned at Bridge Academy (Secondary phase)

Background

Local authorities and schools have statutory duties in relation to the provision of alternative education as follows:

- a) Education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of permanent exclusion, illness, or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education.
- b) Education arranged by schools for pupils who have been excluded on a fixed term basis.
- c) Pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.

The alternative provision we have in Milton Keynes are MK Primary PRU for the primary phase and Bridge Academy, which includes Bridge West, for the secondary and post 16 phases.

The Primary PRU and Bridge Academy are now both part of the Stephenson (MK) Trust and have co-located on the same site at Manor Road in Bletchley (Primary, West, and Post 16) in addition to the Central site in Coffee Hall (Key Stage 3 and 4). This co-location supports partnership working and sharing of training and resources, as well as providing greater flexibility in the use of the commissioned Alternative Education placements. This means that Stephenson (MK) Trust has been able to provide greater capacity for early intervention and support within the primary phase, where it can have the biggest impact, without additional cost to the local school system.

Following collaboration and consultation with the school community, the Primary Inclusion Partnership was launched in September 2020 to reflect the long-standing Secondary Inclusion Partnership which has been in place across the local secondary schools and Bridge Academy. As a natural progression, the partnerships have now been aligned into one holistic Inclusion Partnership across Milton Keynes, that incorporates both primary and secondary phases of education as well as alternative education and special school provision. This partnership supports the successful operation of alternative provision in Milton Keynes.

Access Arrangements

Admission is only for children who are resident in Milton Keynes or who attend a Milton Keynes school. There are a number of potential routes into this provision:

1. Through a referral from a Milton Keynes school as dual placement intervention opportunity. This is accessed via a monthly Panel of peers, or via an emergency placement meeting in the event of serious one off incidents occurring outside of the normal monthly meeting cycle.
2. For a child permanently excluded from a Milton Keynes school. The schools work in partnership to avoid this outcome but a Headteacher retains the right to permanently exclude and if that option is followed then Bridge Academy or MK Primary PRU would be the identified provision from Day 6.
3. For a child resident in Milton Keynes who is permanently excluded from a non Milton Keynes school.
4. For a child of school age new to Milton Keynes where their last placement was in a Pupil Referral Unit or where they were permanently excluded from their last mainstream educational placement.

Bridge Academy West is primarily focused on children that are unable to access mainstream school due to medical reasons, primarily those with mental health concerns, which has seen a sharp rise in recent years following the pandemic. For applications to Bridge West, an appropriate specialist medical professional; as outlined on the form, and not a GP, must have completed the referral section of the Information Passport. Without this the application will not be considered.

Admission to alternative provision in Milton Keynes is overseen by a monthly Alternative Education Panel for each primary and secondary phases. The Panel comprises senior representatives from all mainstream schools in Milton Keynes, senior officers from Milton Keynes Local Authority and multi agency colleagues. The meeting is chaired by the Inclusion Partnership Officer. Reintegrations from alternative provision back into mainstream schools are also moderated at this meeting. Alternative provision is an intervention, not a destination and as such, timely reintegration back to mainstream schools is imperative to the smooth operation of delivery. The timeliness of reintegration should allow for a revolving door with children accessing the provision for short periods before returning to their mainstream school, meaning that the local education system has continual access to alternative provision.

Ensuring children maintain their dual-registration status while accessing alternative provision in Milton Keynes is a key priority for the local MK Inclusion Partnership as this allows proactive placements at alternative education provision for children identified as being at risk of exclusion. This means the places commissioned at alternative education provisions need to be sufficient to support these proactive intervention measures, as well as permanent exclusions. According to Department for Education datasets, nationally in 2023/24 only 41% of children accessing alternative provision were dual registered with a registered mainstream school. In comparison, **90%** of children accessing alternative provision in Milton Keynes are dual-registered which reflects the success of the partnership and supports better opportunities to reintegrate.

Current position

Overall the number of children in Milton Keynes has increased from 47,887 in 2019 to 52,774 according to the most recent census data.

In the primary phase, the number of children has increased by 768 from 27,039 in 2019 to 27,807, an increase of 2.8%. Birth rates have continued to slow in recent years and bulge years have worked

though the primary phase, although significant development has meant primary numbers have still increased over the last five years.

Similarly for the secondary phase, the number of children has increased, although much more significantly, increasing by 3,679 from 16,073 in 2019 to 19,752, up by 22.9%. Bulge years have now worked through into the secondary phase and led to a very significant increase in children of secondary school age.

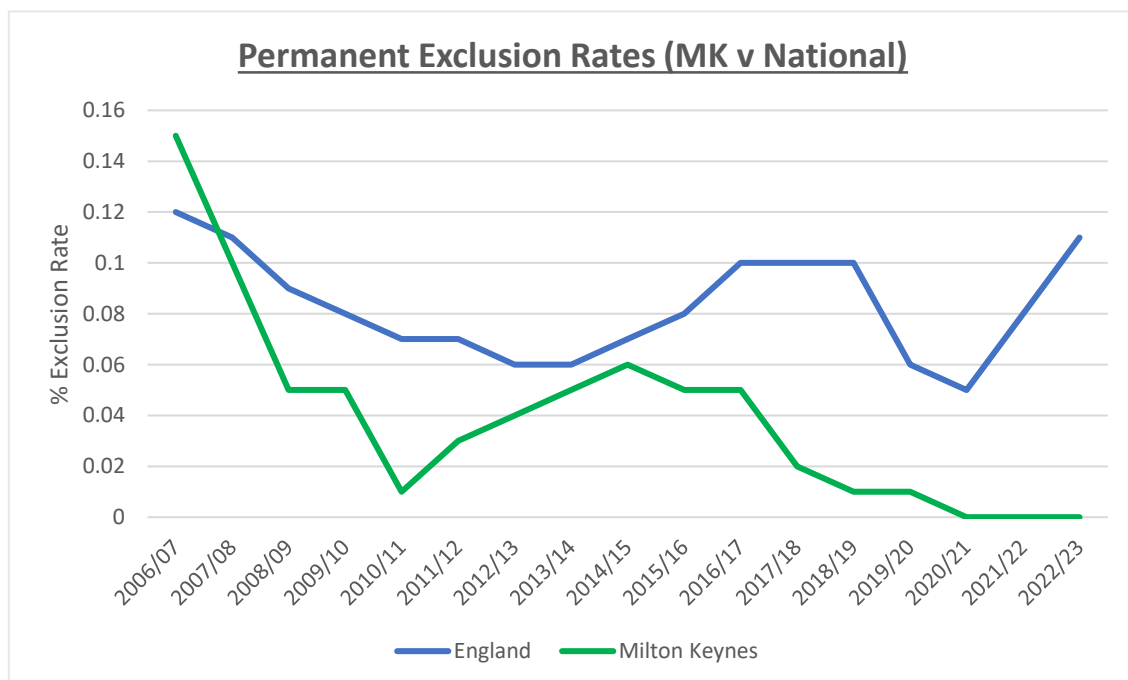
For the 24/25 academic year the following alternative education places were commissioned:

- 25 places at the Milton Keynes Primary Pupil Referral Unit (Primary PRU).
- 195 places at Bridge Academy (Secondary) - This includes 18 places for 'medical needs' (Bridge Academy West).
- 40 places at Stephenson Post 16.

Impact on exclusions

Whilst the Milton Keynes Inclusion Partnership provides proactive support to schools headteachers retain the right to permanently exclude children, if they deem it appropriate. Permanent exclusion rates in Milton Keynes are significantly below the national average which shows the positive collaboration of the local inclusion partnership over recent years. Permanent exclusion rates across England have increased in the last two years, while there have been no permanent exclusions in Milton Keynes from 2019/20 to 2022/23.

In 2023/24 there were 6 permanent exclusions of statutory school age children (2 primary and 4 secondary) across 4 Milton Keynes schools. This remains considerably lower than the national permanent exclusion rate, but the MKIP Review Group are considering the reasons provided for these, and how that impacts the future work of the partnership.



Challenge

Rising pupil numbers

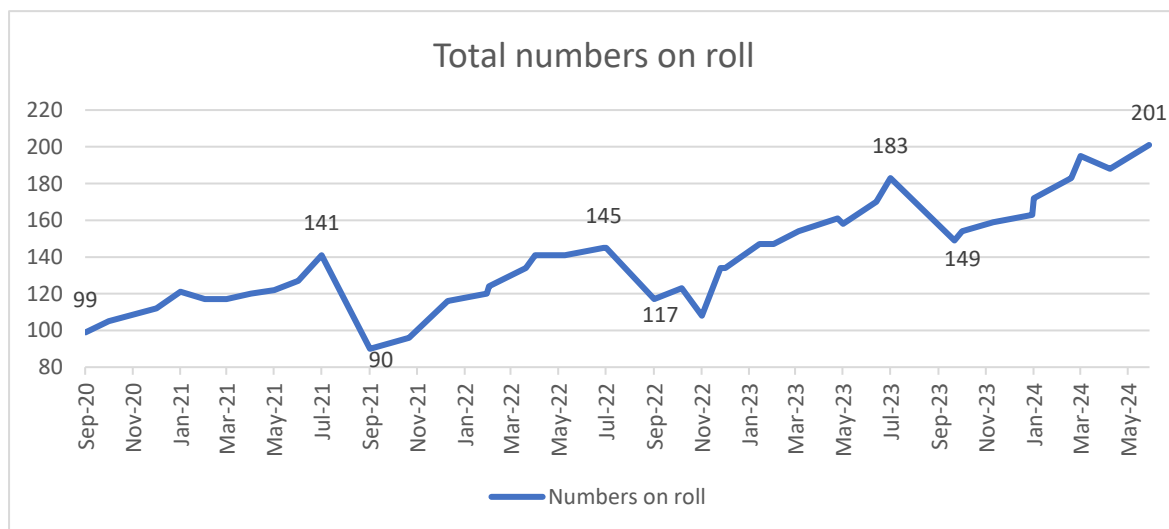
As shown below the number of children accessing alternative provision, has risen significantly since 2020, particularly across the secondary phase. The total number of placements across alternative

provision in Milton Keynes has increased by 47% from 2020. This is a trend that is matched nationally with the number of children accessing alternative provision also increasing by 47% since 2020 across England, although crucially by contrast the majority of the children accessing alternative education provision in MK are dual registered. In Summer 2024, the number of children placed at Bridge Academy and MK Primary PRU exceeded the number of commissioned places (195 commissioned places for Bridge Academy, 25 commissioned places for MK Primary PRU and 40 commissioned places for the Post-16 centre - 260 total). The proportion of secondary phase children accessing a place at Bridge Academy has increased from 0.65% in 2021 to more than 1% in 2024.

| Academic Year | Numbers on roll | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Summer 2020/21 | Summer 2021/22 | Summer 2022/23 | Summer 2023/24 |
| Primary PRU | 26 | 45 | 45 | 40 |
| Bridge Academy | 100 | 115 | 138 | 163 |
| Bridge West | 25 | 31 | 35 | 42 |
| Post 16 | 26 | 13 | 16 | 16 |
| Total | 177 | 204 | 234 | 261 |

It is clear to see the numbers have increased and continue to rise year on year. This is seen at both MK Primary PRU and Bridge Academy, including Bridge West. While post 16 numbers have decreased this may be due to space being utilised for the increased Bridge West demand.

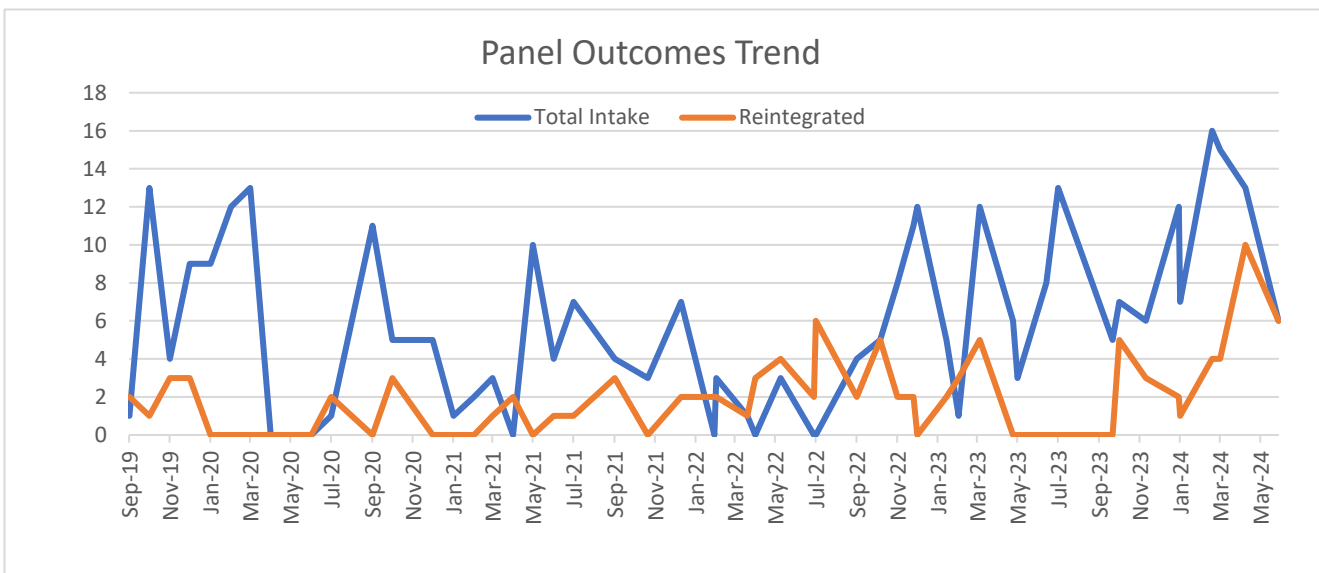
The below graph displays the numbers on roll at Bridge Academy each month from September 2020 to May 2024. Each September and July are marked with the number on roll to show the numbers at the start and end of each academic year. As shown, there is a large decline between the end of the academic year and the beginning of the next, this is due to children in year 11 moving on to other settings.



This graph shows that increases in numbers can be seen across the academic year, it is not only the numbers at the start or end of the year that have increased. The increase in number of children accessing Bridge Academy in September has increased by 50 from 2020 to September 2024, and by 60 from July 2021 to May 2024.

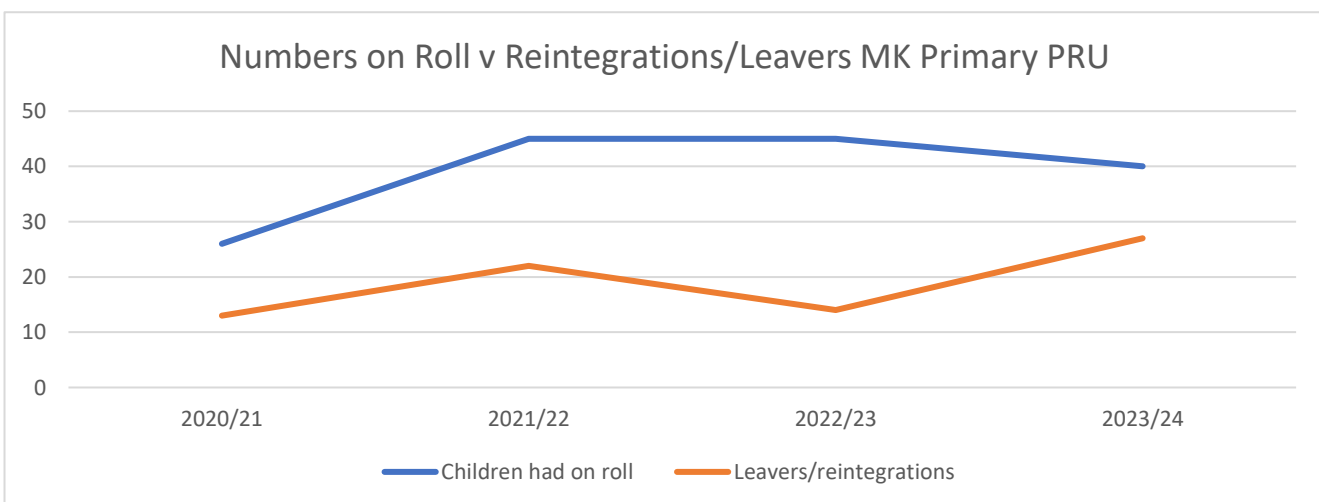
Reintegration

In order for alternative education to work as intended, children should be reintegrated where possible back into mainstream settings. Reintegration takes place via the Milton Keynes Inclusion Partnership (MKIP), with the young person returning to their original school, or an alternative school, where considered appropriate. Re-integration referrals are considered at the monthly alternative education panels, and individual re-integration plans are agreed directly with identified schools to support successful transition.



From September 2023 to July 2024, Bridge Academy reintegrated 38 children back to mainstream school. However, throughout the year Bridge Academy had an intake of 109. This led to the peak of 201 children accessing the provision in May 2024.

A similar picture can be seen in MK Primary PRU, despite reintegration efforts the numbers on roll have risen sharply in recent years. The below chart displays the number of children on roll at MK Primary PRU alongside the number of children than have left the provision.



The efforts of Stephenson Trust to reintegrate children is yielding positive results. However, the volume of children requiring provision continues to rise and outpace the numbers that are leaving as shown by the graphs above.

Length of provision access time

Despite the efforts to reintegrate children back into mainstream schools there are some children that are unable to do so and remain in settings for extended periods of time. It is imperative the system works together to ensure that only children that are able to be successfully reintegrated back into a mainstream setting are admitted to alternative provision, otherwise the places get filled for prolonged periods of time whilst the next appropriate placement is sourced (specialist provision).

A review of the current students at Bridge Academy and MK Primary PRU shows 20 children that have been placed there for at least 2 years, another 16 have been there for at least 18 months:

| Year group | 18-24months | 24+ Months |
|---------------|-------------|------------|
| Year 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Year 8 | 4 | 0 |
| Year 9 | 7 | 5 |
| Year 10 | 4 | 13 |
| Year 11 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 16 | 20 |

Of those children that have been placed in alternative provision for over 18 months, 5 have an EHCP and require a different setting. Of those with an EHCP, four have the primary need of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and one with Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). All children that do not have an EHCP do have SEN Support, the majority of these (22) have SEMH as the primary need. Work is underway to identify whether these children require a more specialist school placement instead of a temporary referral place.

The implication of children accessing a place for far longer than intended, combined with a growing demand, is that there are fewer places available in year for those that most require an intervention. Demand continues to grow for alternative provision and the longer children are accessing a place the harder it becomes to meet this need. Ultimately, this could cause an increase in the number of children permanently excluded from mainstream schools as they are not able to be pro-actively placed in alternative provision to prevent exclusion.

Projected Demand

The projected demand for Alternative Provision is calculated by using the mainstream projections and applying an assumed percentage of children that will access alternative provision.

In the primary phase, numbers accessing alternative provision have maintained a relatively steady position over the past four years at an average of 0.14%. This value has been used to project the level of primary demand in the coming years:

| Academic Year | Primary Projection | AP % | MK Primary PRU Demand |
|---------------|--------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| 2024/25 | 26658 | 0.14% | 39 |
| 2025/26 | 26521 | 0.14% | 39 |
| 2026/27 | 27201 | 0.14% | 38 |
| 2027/28 | 26906 | 0.14% | 38 |
| 2028/29 | 26404 | 0.14% | 38 |

As mentioned above the previous four year trend for the proportion of children accessing a place at Bridge Academy (including Bridge West) has increased from 0.65% of secondary children in May 2021

to over 1% in May 2024. If we assume this trend continues we could see up to 1.3% of children in secondary school accessing an Alternative Provision, the projections are shown below:

| Academic Year | Secondary Projection | AP % | Bridge Academy Demand (incl. Bridge West) |
|---------------|----------------------|--------|---|
| 2024/25 | 19543 | 1.113% | 217 |
| 2025/26 | 19825 | 1.213% | 240 |
| 2026/27 | 20123 | 1.313% | 264 |
| 2027/28 | 20214 | 1.413% | 286 |
| 2028/29 | 20240 | 1.513% | 306 |

The below table shows the 5 year projections for post-16 demand on alternative provision, the general trend over the last 3 years has been a decrease in overall number of children as well as a percentage of the post-16 cohort although there has been a rise in September 2024.

| Academic Year | Post 16 Projection | AP % | Post 16 Centre Demand |
|---------------|--------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| 2024/25 | 3697 | 0.84% | 31 |
| 2025/26 | 4019 | 0.84% | 34 |
| 2026/27 | 4129 | 0.84% | 34 |
| 2027/28 | 4278 | 0.84% | 36 |
| 2028/29 | 4361 | 0.84% | 36 |

Given the projected growth in demand it will be important to review building capacity, both within Stephenson Trust and across other sites in Milton Keynes, to determine where potential additional capacity could be located.

Next Steps

1. Increase the number of places commissioned for 2025/6 by 20 places (+10 Primary, +10 Secondary) to support the growing demand.
2. Ensure admissions are appropriate – additional work needs to be done to support even better identification of appropriate referrals at panel and expectations on schools ahead of panel referrals to identify any underlying long term SEN needs which could be impacting behaviour (via MKIP)
3. Ensure formal processes are in place to capture and monitor trends in alternative provision trends (via MKIP Review Group, and SEND Place Planning Group)
4. Continue to increase the number of children reintegrated back to mainstream schools and monitoring the impact of new pathways (via MKIP)
5. Consider processes for identifying children accessing a place for an extended period within an alternative provision setting and understanding how they are progressed (via MKIP Review Group)
6. Devise and progress a plan to steadily increase number of places in line with projected demand but also accounting for further increases in re-integrations. Review how this may be developed with consideration around current building capacity across Stephenson Trust and place funding implications (via MKIP Review Group and SEND Place Planning Group)