

Summary notes from Ofsted Inspecting AP webinar

January 2024

The webinar built strongly on the blog post about inspection of AP; indeed some of the presentation was taken from that blog. I have incorporated the notes from the blog into this summary, for ease of reference.

The webinar was led by Lee Owston HMI (Deputy Director of Schools and Early education)

It is important to note that mainstream schools must also be aware of this content (if they access any AP) as there was reference to quality assurance of this provision too (see later).

Key points

- Inspection of AP uses the same framework/same handbook
- Inspectors will be flexible when inspecting AP as all settings are so different
- Ofsted have "high curricular expectations for all pupils"
- Ofsted know that the system is under pressure
- A reminder that no school can be "everything to everyone"
- Key question is, "to what extent have leaders done all that can be reasonably expected in the time available and circumstances in which they work?"
- AP is complex and dynamic
- AP and SEND often overlap (indeed 80% children in AP have identified SEND); Ofsted are very aware of the shortage of SEND places and that AP is often "a shadow SEND system" as children wait for places.
- AP capacity and sufficiency are under pressure
- Will be linked to the DfE SEND and AP improvement plan
- There is an understanding from Ofsted that for most AP in Covid it was "business as usual" as the majority of their children were considered vulnerable. This created added challenges that are still being felt today. For example: parents who kept older pupils off during the pandemic, to care for younger siblings; pupils' peers in mainstream were "off school" and so the pressure to join them was great; these patterns of absence are hard to break.

A key focus of the webinar was the Lead Inspector (LI) wanted to gain a real understanding of the AP's "core work and objectives." It was acknowledged that these may be different in each setting and would most likely be very different to mainstream.

Leaders must be able to clearly communicate what their core objectives are for the provision (e.g. around transition to next steps/social inclusion/attendance/attitudes and behaviour)

The initial phone call

- HT (and wider SLT) must be ready to talk through the AP's core work and objectives
- School should be able to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of Behaviour and Attitudes currently

- Be able to explain the behaviour policy and procedures; what will inspectors see in terms of routines and structures?
- How does the curriculum connect with the core work and objectives of the AP?
- How does the school identify and assess pupil's needs?
- How is an ambitious curriculum then built so that it meets pupils' needs, starting points and aspirations?
- What does the AP do to ensure pupils can transition to next steps/destinations and a successful life beyond?
- How do pupils present on arrival?
- What staff training has there been on behaviour, for example?
- AP is complex and the Inspection Plan will be bespoke

What would a "good" or "outstanding" curriculum look like in AP?

- High aspirations
- Reference to paragraphs 283-287 of the handbook
- Does the curriculum have appropriate coverage, content and sequencing?
- Is the curriculum implemented effectively?
- Does the curriculum impact on pupils' outcomes?
- Why this programme for this pupil? How was this decided? How does the pupil feel about that course/offer?
- How is the curriculum helping pupils to *know more and remember more*?

However, it was clarified that Ofsted understand the very different curricular challenges faced by AP:

- Pupils "jumping in and off" at different points in the year
- Some students there for a few weeks, some for months and some permanently
- Gaps in knowledge
- Insufficient pupil information on transition
- Undiagnosed SEND and linked to this: challenging behaviours
- The AP may have different sites, phases etc

Deep dives

- Likely to be National Curriculum subjects [English, Maths, Science and IT] plus reading
- May include a curriculum area specific to the AP (which is linked to their core objectives) e.g. motor vehicle maintenance or an area of the curriculum that the AP has developed to meet pupils' needs that does not have a conventional subject name [e.g. linked to SEMH]
- May be related to the 4 broad areas of SEND
- Likely to be 4 "deep dives" in larger settings

- Is the curriculum *ambitious? Planned and sequenced? Rigorous? Addressing delays and gaps?*
- Achieving qualifications may not always be the right goal but does the course meet the goals of the AP? How does it help the student for the future?
- Is the learning rigorous and sufficiently challenging?
- On the webinar at 17 minutes to 18 minutes there is a good explanation of this in relation to Motor Vehicle maintenance (e.g. are pupils solely *enjoying* working on vehicles or are they learning at a deeper level too?)

Talking to pupils

- Ofsted understand that some pupils may be reluctant/unable to talk to them; they will work with leaders as to the best way to gather pupil voice

Commissioning agreements

- Will look at examples of "live" ones and the story connected/behind
- Will reference against the 2013 DfE statutory guidance regarding these
- These discussions are an opportunity for leaders to show a personalised curriculum "in action"

What sort of evidence will inspectors look at?

- EHC plans and reviews
- PEPs
- IEPs
- Timetables
- Schemes of work/programmes of study
- Student work
- Behaviour Curriculum documents/resources
- Entry assessments
- Meeting notes (e.g. with outside agencies or parents)
- Transition information
- Behaviour and attendance data
- Behaviour plans and risk assessments
- Records and analysis of behaviour incidents (positive and negative)
- Records and analysis of physical interventions
- Records of the use of "seclusion/isolation/calm rooms": how is the AP implementing the guidance from [Positive environments where children can flourish - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-environments-where-children-can-flourish) (www.gov.uk)

Outcomes: what are Ofsted looking for?

- Not expecting a traditional suite of GCSE grades at KS4 (although some students may clearly be on that pathway)
- Outcomes is not just about GCSE grades

- How has the AP provided the positive social and emotional stability that the child needs?
- How is the AP helping pupils meet their ambitions post 16?
- Individual outcomes for that young person (e.g. greater independence/access to college course etc)
- Personal and social development
- Being physically healthy
- Preparation for adulthood and next stage beyond
- Positive participation in wider society

Inspecting behaviour in AP

- Deep dives and student discussions help gather info about behaviour
- If students raise questions about behaviour there will be a "proportionate response" and inspectors will go to speak to more pupils, to see if what has been said is representative
- Staff will be asked about wellbeing, workload and pupil behaviour
- Conversations with pupils at break/lunch/on corridors
- There is an understanding from Ofsted that there has been a real shift in behaviour since Covid and that this is impacting on mental health and absence too
- Are there clear systems and structures around behaviour? If so, pupils will often see these as "fair", even if they do not agree with them. Is there certainty and consistency, where possible?
- How is behaviour explicitly *taught* to pupils? Looking at the Behaviour Curriculum. How is the rationale for behaviour expectations explained to pupils too?
- How does the AP make "good behaviour the default option"?
- How do staff explain the differences to mainstream (in relation to behaviour) when they arrive?
- It is acknowledged that, at times, behaviour seen by inspectors in the AP will be challenging. The school may be in the early stages of understanding what a pupil needs. May need to use restraint. Need to remember that these challenging behaviours are likely to be why the child is there.
- Pupils should be free to leave a space if they feel they need to; only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. physical risk to others) should this not be facilitated
- "Challenging behaviour is not necessarily a dealbreaker for Good or Outstanding"; look at these in the handbook. PRUs have received "outstanding" for behaviour and attitudes.

Mainstream schools commissioning AP

- Where a mainstream school is commissioning AP; inspectors will do their best to visit (at least one provider). At the very least they would speak to them by phone.
- If the provision used is unregistered- they would visit.

- Inspectors would want to know: why have you chosen this provider? Are they safe? Is behaviour improving? How is the provision meeting the pupil's needs? How is it enhancing their education? How does the school QA the provision?
- Some unregistered AP is of good quality; others are not. Sometimes it is not right for the pupils that are accessing it. Ensure that decisions are based on the quality and whether it is "right" for the child.
- If the LA has produced a "directory" or even an "approved" list, schools cannot accept this as reassurance. It is the school's responsibility to quality assure and be happy with the placement.

CR

January 2024