

Alternative Education: Schools and Providers

July 2011



Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

The Child – the Heart of the Matter

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We welcome comments and suggestions on the issues raised in education evaluation reports.



Foreword

The whakataukī of the Education Review Office (ERO) demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people:

Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa
The Child – the Heart of the Matter

In our daily work we have the privilege of going into early childhood services and schools, giving us a current picture of what is happening throughout the country. We collate and analyse this information so that it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. ERO's reports contribute sound information for work undertaken to support the Government's policies.

A priority for the Government is that all children in New Zealand achieve to their potential. The unique place of Māori as tangata whenua is reflected in the Government's commitment to inclusive, equitable and culturally appropriate education for all children in New Zealand.

The aim of Alternative Education is to help students who have become alienated from mainstream education. It provides an opportunity for students to learn in a different context and to return to education with increased confidence and skills. This report discusses how schools manage alternative education and highlights providers' good practice.

Successful education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together for the benefit of children and young people. We trust the information in ERO's evaluations will help them in their task.

Dr Graham Stoop
Chief Review Officer
July 2011

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Secondary Schools and Alternative Education

Overview

Alternative Education (AE) is an initiative for students aged 13 to 16 who have become alienated from mainstream education. Many of the students placed in Alternative Education have been long term truants or have been suspended from one or more schools. AE is provided through school-based and off-site courses. Schools receive funding from the Ministry of Education to develop or purchase these courses. Approximately 3500 students participate in AE each year.

Under the Alternative Education policy, schools that place students in AE are referred to as enrolling schools. AE students remain on the roll of their enrolling school even though they may be placed in an off-site course. Enrolling schools are obliged to maintain an oversight of the pastoral and academic needs of students they have placed in AE. This includes overseeing the transition of students to and from an AE placement, as well as monitoring their educational progress.

This report focuses on two main areas. The first discusses how well secondary schools engage all students in Years 9 to 11. As part of this evaluation ERO looked at aspects such as the academic and pastoral initiatives schools used to help students to succeed at school. By investigating these aspects ERO was able to understand the context in which schools have made decisions to place students in AE.

The second focus is on how well secondary schools have met their obligations as enrolling schools to:

- support the transition of students into, and out of, AE
- work with AE providers
- monitor the performance of students in AE
- monitor the performance of AE providers.

The information for this evaluation was collected during Terms 3 and 4 of 2010, from 44 secondary schools as part of their scheduled education review. Of these schools, 35 had placed students in Alternative Education.

Overall, this evaluation found that the majority of the enrolling schools studied did not provide enough support for the students they had placed in AE. Almost two thirds of the schools that had placed students in Alternative Education did not meet their legal obligations as set out in the 1989 Education Act and the Ministry of Education's AE guidelines. While some had suitable approaches for engaging their students on-site, almost all of these schools had very little involvement in AE once a student was in AE. Moreover these schools had not sufficiently worked with providers and families to help the transition of students back to mainstream school or other supportive destination.

A group of 13 secondary schools did demonstrate good practice in support of the students they placed in Alternative Education. These schools provided high quality oversight of the transition processes for students entering and leaving AE. They involved families in the process of placing students in AE. They worked in partnership with AE providers to give students access to special education services, counsellors, computers, libraries and specialist classrooms. They monitored how well AE worked for their students and they provided assistance to students to entering and exiting from AE.

Based on the Ministry of Education's destination data, this group of 13 schools had a higher proportion of students leave AE and go back to school or go on to training or employment (47 percent compared to 40 percent). Especially significant was the proportion of students who returned to these schools – 34 percent of AE leavers compared to 13 percent of students from other schools.

Significantly, the schools that provided the most support for the students they placed in Alternative Education were also highly effective in engaging all their students in Years 9 to 11. These schools applied a broad range of strategies to engage students across the pastoral, social, sporting, cultural and academic domains. The personnel at these schools demonstrated flexibility and commitment in meeting the individual needs of students.

Next steps

Many secondary schools that place students in AE need to make a significant shift in their approach to AE.

In order to ensure that all enrolling schools are actively supporting the students they place in AE ERO is currently considering how it will evaluate schools and AE in the future.

ERO recommends that:

- Boards of Trustees use the findings, indicators and conclusions of this evaluation, in combination with their own self review, to improve how they help all students succeed at school
- all enrolling schools adhere to the AE guidelines prepared by the Ministry of Education
- all enrolling schools should review the effectiveness of their support for students they place in AE
- the Ministry of Education help all relevant staff to understand the importance of the AE guidelines and work with schools to ensure these guidelines are implemented
- the Ministry provide more guidance to enrolling schools about how they can assist students to enter and exit from AE.

Introduction

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

The Alternative Education (AE) policy is published on the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website. Its aims are as follows:

The Alternative Education (AE) policy aims to cater for the needs and rights of students aged 13 to 15 years who have become alienated from ‘mainstream’ schooling. Students may fall into this category for a number of different reasons. Some students are habitual truants, while others are behaviourally challenging and are consequently excluded from school. The AE policy aims to provide a constructive alternative delivery of education for these students.¹

The focus of Alternative Education is on returning students to education.

The ideal outcome for AE students is a successful return to mainstream education, either at a school or tertiary education. Engagement in the AE programme itself may be an excellent first outcome that may assist in changing the students’ perception of themselves as learners. If a return to mainstream schooling is not achievable, students may go on from the AE programme once they have attained increased confidence and skills to an appropriate community based course, trade programme or other tertiary education, or employment opportunity.

AE is often delivered by external providers, including church-based groups and private training organisations. Many of the providers do not use registered teachers. In some cases schools have their own on-site provision of AE.

Schools often cooperate by pooling their funding to create consortia or clusters. One of the schools is nominated as the consortium lead school or managing school. This school has an overall responsibility for managing the relationship with the cluster’s external providers of AE. The remaining schools, which place students in AE, are referred to as enrolling schools.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF MANAGING SCHOOLS AND ENROLLING SCHOOLS

The obligations of managing schools and enrolling schools are set out in the Ministry of Education guidelines for AE.² These obligations are linked to the 1989 Education Act and the legal requirements of secondary schools.

The Act requires that young people aged 6–15 inclusive are enrolled at and attend a registered school. It also stipulates that a school can arrange for a student to attend a course or programme off-campus and with another provider. Nevertheless, the School of Enrolment remains responsible for the student’s safety, education, and pastoral care.³

- 1 <http://www.tki.org.nz/e/community/alterned/about/index.php>.
- 2 The guidelines are available from <http://www.tki.org.nz/e/community/alterned/resources/>.
- 3 See also Appendix 1.

STUDENTS IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

A majority of the students in AE are Māori. In 2010, 63 percent of AE students were Māori compared to 9 percent for Pacific and 25 percent for Pākehā/European. Two-thirds of AE students in 2010 were male.

Just under 40 percent of AE students in 2009 left to take up further education or employment.⁴ This includes the 21 percent of students who returned to school. Information is not collected on the achievements of students following their return to school. Approximately 60 percent of those students who left AE in 2009 were recorded as having turned 16 (leaving), excluded, in CYF care or detained in custody, or referred to a tracing agency.⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of these students subsequently may have gone on to further education or employment.

GOOD PRACTICE IN THE PROVISION OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

In June 2010 the Education Review Office (ERO) completed an evaluation of six AE providers of whom the Ministry of Education had anecdotal evidence of their effectiveness. The focus of this study was to identify the specific good practice that supported students' achievement in AE. Among the aspects ERO examined were the education outcomes of students in AE, the teaching environment and factors that were critical for the provision of successful AE.

Because of the small sample, the findings of this evaluation do not reflect the overall quality of AE nationally. Nevertheless this study identified factors of good practice common to these six providers. These were:

- the quality of the relationships between staff and students
- the use of a curriculum that matched the individual needs of students
- the committed and compassionate approach of AE staff
- the ability of staff to have students aspire to a more positive future for themselves
- an ability to address the wide range of social and educational needs of students
- the quality of the leadership and teamwork of AE providers
- the positive relationships with schools
- the cooperative relationships with whānau/families.

In addition ERO identified two challenges to ongoing good practice:

- the pedagogical leadership of AE providers
- the quality of exit transitions.

4 2010 data was not available when this report was being written.

5 Such as the Non Enrolment Truancy Service (NETS).

RECENT CHANGES TO ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Up until 2010 approximately \$20 million had been allocated for AE each year. This paid for the 1820 student places across the country (full-time equivalents).⁶ Enrolling schools have a varying number of places depending on their size, decile and overall level of demand. Each place is funded at \$11,100 (GST inclusive).

In September 2010 the Government announced a \$1.5 million funding increase for AE. This will provide additional funding for each AE student. It will also be used to ensure that each AE provider employs a registered teacher to provide advice, professional guidance and support to tutors.

6 1820 full-time places annually allow many more students to cycle through Alternative Education through a year, hence just under 3500 students were in Alternative Education in 2009.

Methodology

SCHOOLS IN THIS STUDY

The information for this evaluation was collected from 44 secondary schools during Terms 3 and 4 of 2010 as part of their scheduled education reviews. The schools were from a range of deciles and sizes. Fourteen of them were managing schools for AE, either as part of a cluster, or as a single managing school.

Nine, including four area schools, had not recently placed a student in AE (or some equivalent such as Activity Centres). Another school had tried unsuccessfully to place a student in 2009. One school had become estranged from its AE provider and had stopped using the service.⁷

⁷ Several students who had left the school had nevertheless been placed with the Alternative Education provider (under that schools name). The school could not explain how this had happened.

Findings

In evaluating schools' use of AE, ERO examined the way in which schools engaged all students from Years 9 to 11. This gave an important context for the decisions schools made in placing and supporting students in AE. This report's findings are consequently divided into the following sections:

- Engaging all students in Years 9 to 11
- The decision to place students in AE
- The decision to place students in AE and student outcomes
- Transitions into and out of AE
- Schools and providers working together
- Monitoring the performance of providers
- Monitoring student progress and outcomes in AE
- Barriers and challenges to positive outcomes for students placed in AE.

Underpinning these sections is a discussion of three broad groups of schools in this evaluation. The first of these includes schools that were effective across the different aspects examined in this evaluation. In broad terms, a third of the schools (12 schools) that placed students in Alternative Education were effective in engaging students while they were on site as well as being generally effective at supporting students who were placed in AE. That said, in some cases there was reason for significant improvements in specific aspects of the support for the students they have placed in AE.

The second group of schools were those that were less effective in most or all of the areas discussed. Two thirds of those that placed students in AE were categorised in this group (23 out of 35 schools).

The final group of schools were the nine that did not place students in AE or any other analogous service such as Activity Centres. While this group is discussed in the section on engaging all students in Years 9 to 11, for obvious reasons they are not included throughout the remainder of this report. As a result many of the sections below discuss findings from 35 schools.

ENGAGING ALL STUDENTS IN YEARS 9 TO 11

As part of this evaluation ERO collected information about the approaches secondary schools have taken to engage all students in Years 9 to 11, including those at risk of educational failure. This information helped to build a picture of the context in which AE was used and how the decisions were made to place students in AE. The information ERO collected included:

- processes for the transition of new students into the school (especially Year 9 students)
- the levels of truancy, stand-downs and suspensions as well as any other indicators related to student engagement
- early identification processes for students at risk of disengaging
- peer support programmes
- pastoral systems, interagency support processes and strategies for involving families and care-givers
- strategies to involve students in the cultural and sporting life of the school
- teaching that meets the needs of individual students
- curriculum and professional development programmes to improve teaching for diverse students.

Schools with high quality processes supporting student engagement

ERO found that 14 of the 44 schools (approximately a third) had high quality approaches for engaging all students in Years 9 to 11. A key feature of these schools was the wide range of effective pastoral and curriculum initiatives they had to support student engagement. Indeed it was the combination of a broad range of initiatives that contributed to the engagement of students rather than any single approach.

These schools demonstrated effective teaching, supportive guidance structures and inclusive school cultures. There were good relationships between staff and students and the school communicated well with parents. The leadership and staff at these schools demonstrated high levels of commitment to meeting individual student needs and a flexible approach in supporting each student so they could stay at school and succeed.

The specific initiatives found at these schools included peer support programmes and systems for monitoring and responding to truancy. They also used student surveys to help identify issues affecting student engagement. Most had introduced restorative practices to enhance school-wide relationships.

These schools had used a wide range of social services to assist them with social issues and help students remain at school. This included such agencies as Police (Youth Aid), Child, Youth and Family (CYF), drug and alcohol counsellors, iwi social services and health professionals.

They had developed academic initiatives to meet the needs of individual students. For example they had introduced academic monitoring to identify students who were not achieving and give them support. Some schools used home rooms for students in Years 9 and 10 to limit classroom and teacher changes.

Most of these schools had also developed support structures for students in Years 9 to 11 that mitigated the need for students to access off-site AE. For example some provided AE on-site and used qualified teachers to deliver part or all of the programme. Other schools used small, specialist classes for students at risk of educational failure to give them programmes designed specifically for their literacy, numeracy and/or behavioural needs.

One school's approach to engaging students

A range of pastoral, social and curriculum strategies is needed to cater for the diverse needs of all students, including those at risk of educational failure.

One school's approach for engaging students encompassed:

- **A well-developed transition programme for Year 9 students.** Staff from the guidance and learning services visited each contributing school to discuss the needs of incoming students. Information about attitude, achievement, background, history and such aspects as RTLB involvement was gathered and discussed with the relevant guidance and teaching staff.
- **In-class support.** The school employed former students to work alongside students in Year 9 classes. The support workers were selected for their ability to form trusting relationships and were given training in supporting students to stay engaged.
- **Year 10 support.** A group of this school's Year 10 students were identified by deans as being at risk of not making a successful transition into Year 11. They have been targeted with in-class support, a goal-setting process and their progress has been closely monitored. These students have also participated in an employment/life skills option as part of their curriculum programme.
- **A school art project.** This initiative has seen the school employ a local artist to work with a group of 10 boys who had been involved with tagging, graffiti and vandalism. The boys had two hours out of timetabled classes on Mondays to work with the artist on an installation for the school grounds.
- **Literacy strategies.** Following the school's PAT and asTTle testing of Year 8 students, a group of low achievers was identified for targeted in-class support. These students were given additional tests, and detailed information on each student was given to their classroom teachers along with specific strategies to address their areas of greatest need.

Continued over the page

- **Initiatives to engage Māori.** The school's deans identified Māori students at risk of not engaging and used senior students to support these students. This leadership programme was led by a deputy principal. It identified suitable senior Māori students as role models and gave these students leadership training. The training was used to help senior students manage lunchtime activities for juniors, some of whom have been based at the school marae. These student leaders also ran a fortnightly breakfast for junior Māori students in the whare kai.

Schools with lower quality processes in support of student engagement

Half of the schools in this project (22 of 44) had some effective approaches to engagement albeit with one or more major area for improvement. A further eight schools showed several areas for development in their engagement of students. The chief areas for development in these 30 schools were:

- the inconsistent quality of teaching
- student truancy
- student engagement in classrooms
- Māori student engagement
- the limited student voice in school management and classroom programmes.

In contrast to schools that demonstrated high levels of engagement, these schools did not coordinate their initiatives to meet the varied individual needs of students. They also had less effective systems for engaging students who might return from AE.

THE DECISION TO PLACE STUDENTS IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

In examining how schools have made decisions to place students in AE, ERO considered the extent to which schools:

- had robust referral and decision-making processes to place a student in AE
- used placement in AE as part of a wider plan to later re-engage a student in education or some other positive outcome.

Most of the schools in this evaluation saw AE as a 'last resort' and used their in-school approaches, and in a few cases Activity Centres, before they placed students in AE. Three schools used AE more proactively by placing students in school-based AE before they became alienated from schooling. The more robust decision-making processes of schools included:

- involvement from staff in the guidance network, eg Deans, Counsellors and Senior Management
- behavioural interventions, ranging from peer support to daily monitoring
- assessment and assistance from the school's special education and/or learning support staff
- contact with external agencies including RTLBs, CYF staff, GSE and Police⁸
- meetings with the family of a student.

Decisions were also affected by the perceived strengths and weaknesses of providers and the likelihood that a student's placement would be a success. For example, at one school, student gang affiliations were a consideration when choosing an AE provider. In another example, a female student was not placed with a provider because she would have been the only girl in the programme.

Importantly, the decision to place a student in AE was not as important as the support that student received from their enrolling school. While most schools used similar processes in deciding to place a student in AE, effective enrolling schools worked with students, their family and providers to make the most of this decision.

TRANSITIONS INTO ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION⁹

The transition between an enrolling school and an AE provider has important implications for student achievement. This change of setting provides an opportunity for schools and providers to work together to discuss a student's strengths and weaknesses and to build a plan for his or her ongoing development. In evaluating the effectiveness of the processes schools used to transition students into AE, ERO used the Ministry of Education's AE guidelines. Enrolling schools were expected to provide the following for each student's transition into AE:

- the reason for their referral to AE
- their current levels of academic achievement (including literacy and numeracy)
- a social and behavioural profile (including involvement with specialist services such as RTLBs, GSE and specialist mental health services)
- assistance in preparing an Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- a list of significant contact people who can also contribute to the development of an IEP
- other relevant information such as any IEPs prepared by the school.

8 RTLBs (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour), CYF (Children, Youth and Family) and GSE (Groups Special Education).

9 In the remaining sections of the findings only those schools with students placed in Alternative Education are discussed. Approximately a quarter of the schools in this sample did not have students in Alternative Education or something analogous such as Activity Centres.

ERO found that 15 of the 35 schools had effective systems for the transition of students into AE. Importantly 12 of the schools in this group were also the schools that had the most engaging contexts for all students. In general, the staff at these schools were much more involved in the placement of students in AE. As seen in the example below, the staff at one school demonstrated the sort of approach required to support a student who is placed in AE.

Effective transition of a student to a provider

Processes for the transition of students from this school to a provider are well planned and organised. The decision to place a student is made after school support strategies have been used and there has been consultation with the student and their parents. The strategies used to support the transition include:

- a meeting involving guidance counsellors, the appropriate dean, the deputy principal with pastoral care responsibilities, parents and the student
- two visits to the centre arranged for the student and parents for discussion with centre staff
- IEPs developed with students, which include behavioural and learning goals.

Attendance and daily progress information is reported to the school every week and a review meeting involving centre and school staff occurs every four weeks. There is an expectation that students will remain in the centre for only a fixed period. Decisions about return to school are made following meetings between school and centre staff, parents and students.

Four out of the seven students placed at the centre in 2010 have returned to the school.

Schools with less effective approaches for moving students to AE were typically less involved in the overall transition process. For example, providers and/or AE coordinators were left to manage without input from the school's teaching staff. The quality of the IEPs was low, for example evidence from one school showed that the IEP meeting seemed concerned with subject choices for the student during their placement with little discussion of the goals and approaches required for the benefit of the student.

In some cases the lack of involvement from enrolling schools was because of the structures being used to manage AE in the cluster. For example in some clusters students placed into AE were put on the non-resourced roll of the managing school. This makes the managing school responsible for such aspects as a student's pastoral care and learning under the National Education Goals (NEGS) and National Administrative

Guidelines (NAGS). Managing schools in this situation seemed to be unaware of their responsibility. Moreover, one cluster had developed such an approach with the support of the local Ministry of Education official with responsibility for AE. Such situations led to no school taking responsibility for the transition of a student in or out of AE thereby reducing the chances that students would return to a mainstream school or go on to training or employment.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some school staff were confused about the exclusion of a student, who they had subsequently placed in AE. Because the exclusion implied that a student would not be returning to that school they did not fulfil their responsibilities as the enrolling school. Hence, as in the situation where students are put on the roll of the managing school, these students were not seen as the responsibility of the school they had last attended. In many cases it appeared to be the AE providers who took responsibility for transitioning these students.

TRANSITIONS OUT OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

The primary aim of AE is to support alienated learners to move back to education, either into mainstream schooling or a suitable tertiary pathway. Where possible some students may go to paid employment from AE. In evaluating the quality of support for transitions from AE to school ERO examined the extent to which:

- the student's whānau/family or caregivers were involved in the development of the exit plan
- there were suitable strategies for helping the student to successfully transition from AE
- the exit transition included clear roles and responsibilities for those supporting the student
- support from external agencies was coordinated (eg for any ongoing health and welfare issues the student has)
- the exit transition was based on the progress students had made in AE.

Transition outcomes

Significantly the eight schools with high quality processes were all part of the 14 schools with the highest levels of involvement as enrolling schools. The efforts of these 14 schools helped more students transition back to school compared to other schools. Whereas the national rate of return to the mainstream for students placed in AE was 21 percent, 34 percent of the students placed in AE by these effective enrolling schools returned to mainstream schooling. This compares to a return rate of 13 percent for the other schools in this evaluation.

ERO found that eight out of 32 schools had high quality processes for transitioning students back to school from AE.¹⁰ These schools showed high levels of commitment to attaining the best possible outcomes for students. They ensured that there were plans put in place to manage the transition process based on the particular needs and interests of the student. Families were involved in these processes, as were the staff members who directly supported a student returning to school, for example deans, counsellors, mentor teachers and form teachers. At one school students were placed in the form class of the AE coordinator because of the positive relationship that had already been developed. At another school a student was placed in a form group with the school's careers counsellor, who also taught a life skills programme on the student's timetable.

Other initiatives ERO observed at schools with high quality support for students leaving AE included the use of Youth Transition Services to develop the transition plan for the student. One school drew on their Gateway and STAR courses to provide students with an opportunity to transition to an educational pathway outside of the mainstream. Some schools took a gradual approach to the reintegration of students and allowed students to attend some mainstream classes while still placed in AE. This gradual transition process was made easier where students were in on-site AE.

Another 14 schools had some high quality processes for transitioning students back into school. The staff at these schools had lower levels of commitment to building a constructive pathway for students from AE. These schools did not involve the same range of staff in transitioning planning, such as deans and careers staff. These schools also tended to be reactive, rather than proactive, in setting up transition processes from AE. In this way, AE providers or students themselves initiated the process of returning to school.

A final group of 10 schools showed some reluctance to be involved in students' transitions from AE and back to school. While some of the personnel at these schools were not against the idea of a student returning from AE, they put no effort into supporting students to return to mainstream schooling.

SCHOOLS AND PROVIDERS WORKING TOGETHER

The AE guidelines make it clear that enrolling schools maintain the legal responsibility for the pastoral and academic care of students placed in AE. It is also important to note that schools have many more resources, compared to most external AE providers, to meet the diverse needs of students. For example secondary schools have specialist classrooms, counsellors and sports equipment that would not be found at an off-site AE provider. In this sense there are legal obligations and resource advantages that

¹⁰ Twelve of the schools did not have enough students transitioning from Alternative Education for ERO to make a judgement about their support for exit transitions.

oblige schools and providers to work together for the benefit of students placed in AE. There are also likely to be benefits in terms of student outcomes, where enrolling schools and AE providers work together. As a team, staff from schools and providers can work together to develop the best possible pathway for students, perhaps to education or training. In light of this, ERO examined how well enrolling schools worked in partnership with the provision of AE. ERO considered aspects such as the extent to which:

- AE providers and schools keep students linked to school social, sporting, pastoral care and support, and cultural activities
- the enrolling school newsletters, publications, ID cards are given to students while at AE
- the enrolling school makes links with Group Special Education (GSE) and the AE provider to support the learning and progress of individual students
- the enrolling school and AE provider work in partnership to resolve any behavioural, learning or attendance issues posed by students
- teachers from the enrolling school support their colleagues in AE with advice, guidance or resources (and vice versa).

ERO found that approximately a third of schools had good partnerships with AE (12 out of 35).¹¹ Six of these schools were managing schools and might be expected to have good relationships with providers. The nature of these partnerships was based on meeting student pastoral, social and academic needs. For example, schools and providers shared high quality academic information in support of student transitions between school and AE. One provider gave weekly attendance information with the enrolling school¹² so that the school's attendance and tracking systems could be used as required.

Four of these schools gave their AE students access to particular mainstream courses. Two of these schools had on-site provision of AE and, in this sense, they kept students 'coming to school' despite their exclusion from the mainstream. These enrolling schools also provided their AE students with access to counsellors and other services, which included careers staff and health providers. Students were encouraged to be involved in school socials, sports and cultural events and they were given access to some school facilities such as the library and technology areas.

Despite the commitment shown by staff at these schools ERO found only a few examples where staff from schools and AE providers shared professional information about effective teaching and learning.

11 Of those schools with students in Alternative Education and/or Activity Centres at the time of the evaluation.

12 This school was not a managing school.

In addition to those schools above, another 12 schools were found to have some positive ways of working with AE providers, albeit with considerable potential for improvement in developing these relationships. These schools tended to be 'open' to supporting the students they had placed in AE, but they were not as proactive as schools with good partnerships with AE providers. For example two of the schools in this group noted that students placed in AE 'could' join sports teams but that their lack of interest prevented their involvement.

Some of these schools had good partnerships with some of the AE providers in their cluster. Most of these schools, however, had very few links with AE providers and very few links to the students they had placed in AE. Hence several of the students placed in AE by these schools were effectively 'out of sight and out of mind.'

The final 11 enrolling schools had very little connection with AE providers. Six of these schools were also managing schools where, as noted above, relationships with AE providers might be expected to be more collegial than with schools that did not administer AE contracts.

These schools all had very few links with AE providers or the students they had placed in AE. For example, these schools did not make connections with GSE on behalf of students placed in AE. There were also few connections linking AE students to the staff, facilities, sports and events at the school.

These schools also employed coordinators who managed many of the day-to-day issues of the AE cluster. These coordinators appeared to work hard to support students placed in AE.¹³ However, the hard work of the coordinators also enabled these schools to delegate their responsibilities as an enrolling school. As a result the coordinator often attended IEP discussions for students, rather than a student's previous teachers. In one school the only communication received about the provision of AE was an annual report. At another school the only real connection between school staff and AE was a meeting, once a term, between the principal and the coordinator.

MONITORING THE PERFORMANCE OF PROVIDERS

In order to fulfil their responsibilities under the AE guidelines, enrolling schools need to know that students are receiving suitable pastoral care and support for their learning in AE. While managing schools can be expected to know more about the performance of AE providers because they administer the contracting process, enrolling schools are expected to have at least a broad understanding of how well providers are performing for their students. ERO considered aspects such as the extent to which enrolling schools:

13 ERO did not specifically evaluate the work of coordinators in this review. ERO did find in its 2010 report on the provision of Alternative Education that coordinators could be important in creating an effective Alternative Education service.

- received self-review reports from the provider
- received evaluations undertaken by the managing school
- made visits to the providers to collect anecdotal and observational information regarding student performance and any issues affecting teaching and learning
- received informal/anecdotal reports from managing schools about the performance of providers
- received student evaluation and feedback on the performance of providers
- received documentation about student progress and achievement, such as IEPs or reports.

ERO found that most of the 35 enrolling schools did not know enough about the performance of AE providers. Eight of the schools that had placed students in AE had a good understanding of how providers were performing. Four of these schools were managing schools, with two schools having on-site AE provision. Where AE was on-site it was relatively straightforward to monitor the performance of staff working with AE students. For example, at one school AE students had IEPs and portfolio assessment information that was accessed by school managers.

For those schools with off-site providers, the relationship between school and provider staff was a basis for many different sources of information about how well AE providers were performing. For example, at one school there were day-to-day discussions between the AE coordinator and the deputy principal. The principal also met with the coordinator, social agencies and the manager of the AE provider to discuss operations. Students were also interviewed about their time in AE when they returned to school. The school did not, however, receive any review material from their managing school about the performance of the provider. At another enrolling school, the deans and guidance counsellor made regular visits to the AE provider to monitor the progress of students. They talked with the students while visiting the provider and also contacted parents to learn their perspective on how well their students were doing at AE. The school was in regular phone and email contact with the provider and received copies of the students' reports from AE.

Another 14 schools had a few ways of knowing about the performance of providers. These sources of information often provided only a limited view of how well providers were performing. For example, some of these enrolling schools received very little other than annual and/or term reports about provider operations. Others had informal sources of information about provider performance although they did not have any in-depth reviews or evaluations. A couple of schools knew about the performance of Activity Centres where they had placed students, although they knew very little about the

performance of the AE provider where other students were placed. One school believed that there was little point following up on the performance of their provider because once students had been placed in AE they would not be returning to school.

A final group of 11 schools in this evaluation had minimal, informal knowledge of how well AE was operating for their students. In most of these schools the connection between the enrolling school and the providers was solely through the AE coordinator.

MONITORING STUDENT OUTCOMES IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

In examining what school personnel knew about student outcomes ERO investigated the extent to which schools had:

- provided regular student achievement information to the school board and leadership
- recorded observational information regarding student performance
- documented student learning plans
- recorded student attendance information.

The section directly above outlined how enrolling schools and providers could work in partnership to share pastoral and academic information. In addition to this data however, most schools had very little formal information or analysis about student outcomes in AE.

Schools that were more involved as enrolling schools, had documented evidence of the destination data of students, usually going back for more than one year. Destination data is typically distributed to the enrolling schools each year by the managing schools as part of their reporting requirements to the Ministry of Education. In this sense, all enrolling schools should have destination data for the students they place in AE. Effective enrolling schools also had some informal information about students who had previously been in AE. For example schools knew about students who had returned to their school from AE.

Schools that were less engaged as enrolling schools were less likely even to have documented evidence of student destinations from AE. Despite student destination data being available from the managing schools, as part of their Ministry reporting requirements, most of these schools had only a partial and/or informal knowledge of student destinations following AE.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO GETTING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS PLACED IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

ERO asked personnel at each school what they considered to be the main barriers and challenges to achieving positive outcomes for students placed in AE. A variety of barriers or challenges were identified. The most common were funding and workforce issues, the drugs and gang context of students' lives, and the low quality of family life or parenting experienced by students.

The funding issues were related to the uncertain future of AE at the time of school reviews. There were concerns about the amount of funding AE received and the uncertainty of this funding for the future. Since the information was collected for this evaluation the government has decided to continue AE and also announced an increase of AE funding.

The workforce issues involved concerns about the untrained staff often used by AE providers. Three school leaders noted that the frequent use of untrained staff was difficult to understand given the complex needs of students. The government's recent announcement about the use of more trained teachers in AE is targeted at such concerns.

Transport was a challenge noted by some of the schools in provincial towns and rural communities. The distance between the school and an AE provider meant that AE was difficult for students to access.

While many school personnel identified social and family factors as barriers to students achieving positive outcomes, only two staff identified that secondary schooling could, itself be a barrier to student success. These staff noted that in many cases secondary schools did not meet the needs of students at risk of educational failure and that the teaching and curricula of secondary schools was, itself, a factor in such students becoming alienated.

Conclusions

Over three-quarters of the secondary schools in this evaluation placed at least one student in AE (or an equivalent service such as an Activity Centre). Placing a student in AE does not end a school's responsibility for that student's welfare. This is set out in the Education Act and the Ministry's AE guidelines. It is demonstrated in the work of those schools in this evaluation that used AE effectively.

Two thirds of the schools that placed students in AE were not sufficiently involved in this process. Most enrolling schools had a very limited involvement with AE once a student was off-site. Too many schools did not actively work with providers to help students to transition back to education. For many of these schools the students placed in AE are out of sight and out of mind.

In contrast to these schools, a third of schools that placed students in AE (13 schools) demonstrated a broad range of effective supports for students. These schools had effective approaches for engaging all students on-site, including those at risk of educational failure and they had effective processes in support of those students who were placed in AE.

Effective strategies for engaging all students on-site span the pastoral, social, sporting, cultural and academic domains. School leaders and school personnel demonstrated commitment to meeting the individual needs of students and the flexibility required to respond suitably to the diverse needs of students. For students who were at risk of becoming alienated from school, this involved connections with families and social agencies.

These effective enrolling schools oversaw the transition processes for students entering and leaving AE. They worked in partnership with AE providers to give students access to special education services, counsellors, computers, libraries and specialist classrooms. They monitored how well AE worked for their students and they transitioned students in and out of AE with full reference to the educational and social needs of each student.

Based on the Ministry of Education's destination data, the schools who were more engaged as enrolling schools had more AE students either return to school or enter training and employment compared to the other schools in this evaluation (47 percent compared to 40 percent). Notably, the effective enrolling schools had 34 percent of their AE students return to school compared to only 13 percent of AE students from the other schools.

A majority of the most effective enrolling schools also had some form of on-site provision for students struggling with mainstream education. Two schools used on-site AE provision as part of a process to keep students engaged with schooling. Other schools used specialist classes or programmes to support students with high literacy, numeracy and/or behavioural needs. In some cases students transitioning back from AE could use these classes (or other similar transition processes) to help adjust to being back at school.

One way, therefore, that more schools can become better at transitioning students back from AE is to establish programmes that are more like those that are familiar to students returning from AE and, perhaps, where (if they are returning to school) they have recently achieved some success. Similarly, for those students who have turned 16, schools need to use a variety of approaches to engage students returning from AE in post-compulsory education and training.

Next steps

In order to ensure that all enrolling schools are actively supporting the students they place in AE ERO is currently considering how it will evaluate schools and AE in the future.

ERO recommends that:

- Boards of Trustees use the findings, indicators and conclusions of this evaluation, in combination with their own self review, to improve how they help all students succeed at school
- all enrolling schools adhere to the AE guidelines prepared by the Ministry of Education
- all enrolling schools should review the effectiveness of their support for students they place in AE
- the Ministry of Education help all relevant staff to understand the importance of the AE guidelines and work with schools to ensure these guidelines are implemented
- the Ministry provide more guidance to enrolling schools about how they can assist students to enter and exit from AE.

Appendix 1: Destination data for Alternative Education students 2009

The table below shows the percentage of 'successful outcomes' for students in AE in 2009.

The first section of the table shows all those who were in AE in 2009. Note that those students under the 'open' and 'new placement' categories continued on in AE in 2010.

The second section of the table adds up the successful outcomes of all leavers. This section excludes those who continued on in AE in 2010. Successful outcomes are a return to school, transition to a training course or employment.

All students in Alternative Education in 2009	No. of students
Correspondence School	22
Deceased	2
Detained in Custody	19
Employment	75
Excluded	32
In CYF (or other Agency) Care	47
Left NZ	65
New Placement (another Alternative Education provider)	132
Open (continued enrolment with Alternative Education)	795
Referred to tracing agency	786
Returned to (a regular) School	526
Training course	325
Turned 16 – finished schooling	590
Total number of students in AE in 2009	3416
Less those who left to a new (AE) placement	132
Continued their AE enrolment from 2008	795
Total number of leavers in 2009	2489

Outcomes of all leavers	No. of students		Percentage
	All Outcomes	Positive Outcomes	
Correspondence School	22		
Deceased	2		
Detained in Custody	19		
Employment	75	75	3.0%
Excluded	32		
In CYF (or other Agency) Care	47		
Left NZ	65		
Referred to tracing agency	786		
Returned to (a regular) School	526	526	21.1%
Training course	325	325	13.1%
Turned 16 – finished schooling	590		
	2489	926	37.2%

Source: Ministry of Education

Appendix 2: Secondary schools and Alternative Education indicator framework

The indicators below outline the characteristics of good practice for schools’ use of Alternative Education. These indicators are not an exhaustive list but are designed to provide an outline of the quality expected from schools in their use of Alternative Education.

Alternative Education within the school’s strategy for engaging students

Alternative Education’s place

- The school’s use of Alternative Education is part of an overall approach which is predominantly effective at identifying and removing significant barriers to learning. The features of this system include:
 - high quality processes for transitioning new students into the school, especially at Year 9
 - low levels of truancy, stand-downs and suspensions and any other indicators showing low student engagement
 - processes which identify students at risk of disengaging as early as possible
 - identifying and attempting to resolve the root causes for a student’s lack of engagement
 - initiatives which work with those students who are identified to be at risk of disengaging (this could include buddy or mentor programmes, the support of teachers, guidance counsellors or Deans, involvement in extra-curricula activities, strategies with families and caregivers, careers support, interagency support)
 - significant efforts to adapt teaching to the needs of students, such as the development of an Individual Learning Programme, Individual Education Plan and attempts to engage students on the basis of their strengths and interests

<p>Alternative Education's place (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a clear understanding of how to teach diverse learners, including the Māori and Pacific students, boys and girls, and students with special needs – a curriculum, pedagogy and professional development programme which is developing high quality teaching across the school ie, teaching that is engaging and effective for diverse students. • Alternative Education is NOT an easy option for removing a troublesome student but is used as an extension of the school's approach to meet the individual needs of students.
<p>School decision-making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative Education (AE) is NOT an easy option for removing a troublesome student but is used as an extension of the school's approach to meet the individual needs of students. • Robust referral and decision-making to place a student in AE including looking at other options. • A placement in AE is part of a wider plan to re-engage the student in education or some other positive outcome (see below to judge the quality of these transitions).

Transition into and out of Alternative Education

Transition into AE

- The AE provider should receive information from the enrolling school on:
 - current levels of academic achievement (including literacy and numeracy)
 - social and behavioural profile (including involvement with specialist services such as RTLBs, GSE, specialist mental health services: CAMHS/CAFS etc)
 - significant contact people who are able to contribute to the development of an individual plan
 - other relevant information e.g. current Individual Education Plan (IEP) if applicable
 - reason for the referral to AE.
- IEPs are developed with representatives from the provider and the enrolling school. IEPs should:
 - have family or caregiver commitment
 - include an outline of the student's strengths and interests and how these can be used to support his or her learning within AE
 - have clear goals for learning and development
 - address how any barriers to learning will be addressed with the support of external agencies, this may include drug and alcohol dependency, anger management issues, learning problems
 - clearly set out the processes to be used to support students to reach their goals, including who will carry out what tasks and by when
 - have regular review times built in
 - be linked to a plan for the transition to a positive outcome after AE
 - have an indication of what the young person wants to achieve in AE and what they want to achieve in the future education and/or employment.

<p>Transition into AE (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are processes in place for inducting students into the provider. • The school and provider guide the student into AE, this includes letting the student know what is expected, welcoming the student.
<p>Transition from AE to positive outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exit transition from AE is back to mainstream education, school-based training (Gateway), tertiary training or employment. • The student’s whānau/family or caregivers are involved in the development of the exit plan and are clear on how they will support the student’s future development. • The transition includes strategies for supporting the student to succeed – these strategies must be realistic, considered and likely to be effective. • The exit transition includes clear roles and responsibilities for the student and those supporting the student after they leave AE. • The exit transition involves support from external agencies as required (for instance for any ongoing health and welfare issues). • The exit transition is based on the progress students have made in AE.

Schools and providers working in partnership

Partnership

- AE providers and schools keep a student linked to school social, sporting, pastoral care and support, and cultural activities as is appropriate.
- The enrolling school’s newsletters, publications, ID cards are provided to the student while at AE.
- As appropriate, the enrolling school makes links with Group Special Education and the AE provider to support the learning and progress of individual students.
- The enrolling school and AE provider work in partnership to resolve any behavioural, learning or attendance issues posed by students.
- The enrolling school and provider work with external agencies to resolve issues for students.
- Personnel from the school and the provider work together to discuss student learning and progress.
- Teachers from the enrolling school supporting their colleagues in AE with advice, guidance or resources (and vice versa) both academic and pastoral.

Monitoring and evaluating the progress and achievement of students in AE

Monitoring academic achievement

- Student achievement information is regularly provided to the school board and leadership (for instance monthly).
- Enrolling school leadership makes visits to the providers to collect anecdotal and observational information regarding student performance.
- Enrolling school representatives attend any reviews of a student’s IEPs.

<p>Monitoring social progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student attendance information is provided to the enrolling school (this information needs to be timely to allow the enrolling school to respond to any issues).• Student behaviour and engagement is reported to the enrolling school regularly and/or as is necessary.
<p>Evaluating student performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The enrolling school uses achievement information to make judgements about the student's eventual transition.• The information on student performance is used to reconsider a student's place in AE if required.

The performance of providers

Direct evidence of performance

- Self reviews carried out by the provider and/or evaluations undertaken by the managing school. These evaluations should include:
 - data and analysis on student academic achievement
 - an overview of the programme with evidence about which aspects have been effective and which have not
 - an overview on the quality of teaching, including the qualification status of staff
 - next steps for improving the quality of education
 - next steps for improving the quality of support for students
 - information which accurately portrays the financial position of the provider
 - an overview of how the provider is performing against key policies for personnel management, health and safety etc.
- Enrolling schools make visits to the providers to collect anecdotal and observational information regarding student performance and any issues affecting teaching and learning.
- Informal/anecdotal reports from managing schools about the performance of providers.

Indirect evidence of performance

- Effective protocols are in place to manage the relationship between enrolling and managing schools for the benefits of students.
- The enrolling school receives student evaluations and feedback.
- The enrolling school receives information on student attendance at AE.
- Any documentation about student progress and achievement (such as plans, IEPs, reports and so on) the school receives from the providers.

Appendix 3: The specific requirements of enrolling schools

The Alternative Education guidelines state that enrolling schools have the following responsibilities for students placed in AE.

- Responsibility for the pastoral and academic care of ALL students on their roll including input into the IEP and transition plans for AE students.
- Ensure that providers receive pertinent information on students entering AE, eg academic records, reason for referral etc.
- Academic achievement of all students, including AE students, is reflected in the overall achievement rates of a school reported to the Ministry of Education.
- Administrative tasks eg early leaving exemptions, stand downs, suspensions and exclusion decisions, enrolment and collating attendance data. Note that early leaving exemptions stand downs, suspensions and exclusion rates and attendance rates of AE students are also reflected in the overall rates of a school reported to the Ministry of Education and monitored by the board of trustees.
- Ensuring the requirements of the National Administration Guidelines (NAGS) and National Educational Guidelines (NEGs) are met as well as the legislative requirements of the Education Act 1989.
- Ensure that AE students are correctly included in the roll return given to the Ministry of Education. When a school is visited by the resourcing auditors, its roll return will be checked to ensure that AE students are satisfactorily accounted for. Information on how to complete a roll return can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.

Appendix 4: Report feedback form

Secondary schools and Alternative Education

The information in this box is optional	
Name:	
School/Institution:	
Your role: (for example, Teacher, Parent, Trustee, Researcher, Principal)	
Address:	

Please help ERO evaluate the quality of this report. By sending ERO your views on this report you are contributing to the quality of future national reports.

*Please send your comments by email to info@ero.govt.nz; by fax to the following number: 0-4-499 2482; or post to: **Evaluation Services, Education Review Office, Box 2799, Wellington 6140** (Freepost authority number 182612).*

- How readable is this report? (language, structure and content) Indicate one of the following:

Highly readable		Fair		Not very readable
5	4	3	2	1

- Were there any aspects or sections of this report that were difficult to understand?
Yes / No

If yes, what sections or aspects were difficult to understand?

3. *For school personnel:* How useful is this report in helping you identify ways to improve your work with vulnerable students? Indicate one of the following:

Highly useful		Moderately		Not very useful
5	4	3	2	1

4. Which aspects of this report provided the most useful information about schools and Alternative Education?

5. What improvements could be made to make future reports more useful for teachers, principals and board members?

6. Any other comments? If you have any other suggestions or comments about the quality or content of this report, or about how this report has been used by you or your school, please include them below.

Thank you for completing this form. The information you provide will be used to reflect on how future national reports are prepared by the Education Review Office.

Good Practice in Alternative Education

Overview

In June 2010 the Education Review Office (ERO) evaluated the work of six Alternative Education providers. This work was undertaken through an agreement with the Ministry of Education, which had anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of these providers. The focus of this study was to identify the specific good practice that supported students' education. Among the aspects ERO examined were the education outcomes of students in Alternative Education, effective teaching environments and the success factors that were critical for the provision of good alternative education.

Because of the small sample, the findings of this evaluation can only be considered indicative. Moreover this evaluation does not comment on the overall quality of Alternative Education nationally. Nevertheless, this small study identified factors of good practice common to these six providers that will be of interest to others involved in the provision of Alternative Education.

Just under 3500 students, aged 13 to 16 currently participate in Alternative Education each year. These students are among those most at risk of failure in the education system. They are in Alternative Education because their truancy and/or experience of schooling has seen them disengage from education.

Approximately \$20 million is set aside to pay for Alternative Education each year. It is important for these students, and the wider public, that their time in Alternative Education contributes to their achievement of positive outcomes, such as a return to school or higher training or employment.

Alternative Education is arranged through consortia or clusters of schools. The consortium lead schools (managing schools) manage the relationships with various education providers through a memorandum of understanding. Managing schools also employ coordinators to oversee this contract with external providers. In some cases the managing schools have their own on-site provision of Alternative Education. External Alternative Education providers come from a range of backgrounds including church-based groups and private training organisations. Many of the providers do not use registered teachers to deliver their programmes.

ERO observed the Alternative Education programmes, collected documentation and talked with staff, students and the coordinators of Alternative Education consortia or clusters.

A set of indicators was developed for this review. These indicators were based on ERO's experience as well as the Ministry of Education's *Literature Review and Report on Key Informants' Experiences*.¹

ERO's findings for this report are set out under three main headings:

- Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment
- A focus on the whole student
- Leadership, coordination and quality systems.

Each of these sections details the nature of good practice at the providers visited by ERO. This discussion of good practice includes specific examples of provider practices.

The conclusion of this report outlines the critical success factors underpinning the good practice of these providers.

- The quality of the relationships between staff and students
- The use of a curriculum that matched the individual needs of students
- The passionate and compassionate approach of Alternative Education staff
- The ability of staff to have students aspire for a more positive future for themselves
- An ability to address the wide range of social and educational needs of students
- The leadership and teamwork of Alternative Education providers
- The relationships with schools
- The relationships with whānau/families.

In addition to these success factors ERO also identified two challenges to ongoing good practice. These were:

- the pedagogical leadership of Alternative Education providers
- the quality of exit transitions.

1 O'Brien, P., Thesing A. & Herbert P. (2001) *Literature Review and Report on Key Informants' Experiences*.

Introduction

EVALUATING THE PROVISION OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

In June 2010 the Education Review Office (ERO) evaluated the work of six Alternative Education providers. The focus of this work was in identifying their good practice in support of student education.

This work was undertaken through an agreement with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry and ERO agreed that this evaluation would examine:

- the education outcomes for the students enrolled with the Alternative Education providers
- effective teaching in alternative education environments
- critical success factors underpinning good practice by Alternative Education providers
- quality assurance processes that lead to good student achievement
- suitable self-review processes
- examples of good links with the enrolling school
- the role of Te Aho Te Kura Pounamu/The Correspondence School (Te Kura)
- the role and impact of any wrap-around services the students in the sample Alternative Education programmes receive.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION POLICY

The Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website states that:

The Alternative Education (AE) policy aims to cater for the needs and rights of students aged 13 to 15 years who have become alienated from 'mainstream' schooling. Students may fall into this category for a number of different reasons. Some students are habitual truants, while others are behaviourally challenging and are consequently excluded from school. The AE policy aims to provide a constructive alternative delivery of education for these students.

Some students do fall out of the system, and Alternative Education is designed as the last resort in a range of responses to ensure that all students engage with education.²

² <http://www.tki.org.nz/e/community/alterned/about/index.php>.

The focus of the current Alternative Education policy is on returning alienated students back into education. As is also stated on Te Kete Ipurangi:

The ideal outcome for AE students is a successful return to mainstream education, either at a school or tertiary education. Engagement in the AE programme itself may be an excellent first outcome that may assist in changing the student's perception of themselves as learners. If a return to mainstream schooling is not achievable, students may go on from the AE programme once they have attained increased confidence and skills to an appropriate community based course, trade programme or other tertiary education, or employment opportunity.

Just under 3500 students aged 13 to 16³ currently participate in Alternative Education each year. These students are among the most at risk students in the education system. They are in Alternative Education because their truancy, behaviour and engagement have essentially seen them disengaged from education.

Approximately \$20 million is set aside to pay for Alternative Education each year. This money is used to pay for the 1820 student places across the country (full-time equivalents).⁴ Each place generates \$11,100 (GST inclusive) and this money is allocated to schools in line with the places they hold.

In many situations schools cooperate by bringing together their funding to create consortia or clusters. One of the schools is nominated as the consortium lead school or managing school. The remaining schools that have students attending Alternative Education are referred to as enrolling schools. The obligations of managing schools and enrolling schools are set out in the Ministry of Education guidelines for Alternative Education.⁵

The consortium managing schools take responsibility for the relationships with various education providers on behalf of their Alternative Education cluster. These relationships are contracted through a memorandum of understanding. In some cases the managing schools have their own, on-site provision of Alternative Education. The external providers come from a range of backgrounds including church-based groups and private training organisations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the providers do not use registered secondary teachers to deliver their programmes.

3 The TKI website states that: "Students can stay on a programme until they are 16 years old. If a student has not completed their learning goals by their sixteenth birthday, they may stay on the programme for a little longer. In many cases the student will return to school when they are able to manage a mainstream programme." Retrieved from www.alternativeeducation.tki.org.nz/Kaupapa-About-Alternative-Education/How-does-it-work (27 July 2010)

4 1820 full time places annually allow many more students to cycle through Alternative Education through a year, hence just under 3500 students were in Alternative Education in 2009.

5 The guidelines are available from <http://www.tki.org.nz/e/community/alterned/resources/>

EDUCATING VULNERABLE STUDENTS

The life experience and backgrounds of the children and young people in Alternative Education can mean that they have a history of limited success at school. They are likely to have been in conflict with teachers and principals in the past and may see school as a place that is unsupportive and a waste of their time.

A 2001 Ministry of Education literature review on Alternative Education⁶ provides an overview of how Alternative Education students can be engaged in education. The literature listed several conditions and actions that could improve students' attendance, engagement and behaviour. These were:

- a warm, nurturing and safe atmosphere
- staff intuition in responding to student needs
- warm reciprocal relationships between staff and student
- small classes with individual programmes and support
- educational activities happening in authentic settings such as shopping malls or real work situations
- peer induction and support
- close relationships with adult educators as role models
- recognition that previous structures have not worked for students
- non-authoritarian structures where the power is shared between the student and teacher.

The importance of employing high quality teachers for alternative education is emphasised in this literature review. In particular, attention is drawn to teachers' skills in developing literacy, numeracy and life skills as well as their ability to manage students' transition into and out of alternative education.

The Ministry's literature review on Alternative Education cites the following as important for developing effective transition processes for students:

- multi-disciplinary support for students
- transition and exit plans that set goals based upon informed decisions
- collaboration between mainstream and alternative settings
- coordinated links between school, family and social service agencies
- post programme support that is ongoing until the student is well established in further training or the workforce.

These points influenced the indicators ERO used in this evaluation. These indicators are found in Appendix 1 of this report.

6 O'Brien, P., Thesing A & Herbert P. (2001) Literature Review and Report on Key Informants' Experiences.

Methodology

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVIDERS IN THIS STUDY

The providers for this evaluation were selected from a list supplied by the Ministry of Education, which had anecdotal evidence of their effectiveness in supporting student education. In this report they are identified as Providers A through F.

These providers accommodated between seven and 20 students, although one provider had over 40 students in its programme. Students attend these providers for various lengths of time. Some students may stay only one or two months, while others may attend for two years or more. The average enrolment time for a student was approximately 18 months. The majority of the students were Māori. There were also many more males than females. This is in line with the ethnicity and gender breakdown of Alternative Education nationally.

Alternative Education providers had links with a managing school and an Alternative Education coordinator. The Alternative Education coordinators are employees of the school. Their role is to manage the contract with the Alternative Education providers.

In addition, all of the providers in this evaluation were part of a larger organisation, which offered other social services in addition to Alternative Education. They had their own approaches, resources, infrastructure and management structures working alongside their relationship with the managing and enrolling schools.

The typical daily routine in Alternative Education involves students assembling at the provider, with some students being transported by provider staff. Students have a concentrated time on their individual study materials (this is usually Correspondence school work or an equivalent developed by the provider). Some group teaching may also occur as part of this study time. Most staff and students eat lunch together.

Students have an opportunity during the day to take other options, including physical education, outdoor education, integrated studies and the arts. Some students may also undertake work experience placements at different times during the day. Staff may also manage student appointments during the day to visit counsellors or health and welfare providers.

APPROACH TO THIS STUDY

The focus of this evaluation was the good practice of these Alternative Education providers. It is important to point out that a small number (six) were examined as part of this evaluation. A broader sample may reveal additional findings. This report does not provide comment on the overall quality of all Alternative Education provision.

A team of two ERO review officers spent time on-site with each provider for up to two days. During that time the review officers observed classes, examined documentation and interviewed staff, students and in some cases, staff from the managing schools, including the coordinators and principals.

Findings

This report's findings are divided into three sections.

- Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment
- A focus on the whole student
- Leadership, coordination and quality systems.

Each of these sections has smaller sub-sections dealing with specific aspects. In addition, the conclusion of this report distils and presents the critical factors underpinning the good practice of the Alternative Education providers.

PEDAGOGY, CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

In examining the pedagogy, curriculum and assessment at the Alternative Education providers ERO examined the following:

- the quality of curriculum, planning and assessment
- the approaches for identifying student needs
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- the pedagogy, culture and environment
- levels of student engagement
- student numeracy and literacy development.

The key areas of good practice under this heading can be summarised as:

- the relationships between staff and students
- structured and individualised academic programmes
- future focus
- good academic outcomes and positive destinations.

The relationships between staff and students

A key strength at the Alternative Education providers was the quality of relationships between tutors and students. In contrast to many of the relationships students had experienced in schools, the relationships between tutors and students was respectful, relaxed and supportive. Tutors also held high expectations for students.

The quality of the relationships between staff and students is evident in the comments made to ERO by a group of students at Provider B.

I feel pretty comfortable and getting along with everyone.

I'm not what I was like at school – here I keep my head down and work.

I've learnt how to be more responsible and I can show my parents I can actually do something.

The course changes everyone for the better – we are more confident, more open and thinking more about the future.

The course has changed me – given me discipline. I've achieved my 8 plus 8 credits and I'm now working on further literacy and maths credits for NCEA

I'm no longer in a gang – I stopped as soon as I came here.

Many factors underpinned the quality of the relationships between staff and students at the Alternative Education providers. In an overall sense, the positive relationships were a function of the tutors' ability to relate to students, and students having their educational and social needs met. Students expressed a sense of belonging and felt supported academically, socially, culturally and physically.

High degrees of trust were evident between staff and students. Students felt that there were staff members who would support them even with their most difficult issues. For example, it was not uncommon for tutors to give students their contact numbers so they could call them out of school hours if they were in trouble.

The tutors at the Alternative Education providers were also adept at empathising with students. Many of the tutors had experienced their own difficulties in the past and this helped them to understand the issues facing students. Moreover, the background of tutors at the Alternative Education provider usually reflected the cultural background of the students. This also helped tutors to build connections and understanding with students.

Part of empathising with students is in building a flexible and tolerant approach to their lives. Staff needed to work with students to build positive outcomes amid the issues they have faced, such as drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy and gang connections. Working with students on such issues could mean doing things differently to what would be expected in most mainstream schools. For instance at Provider C, students could access the shower and clean clothes if they turned up 'worse for wear' from the night before. Staff would even allow students to rest and recover on a couch until they were ready for learning and other assistance.

In some ways the nature of the relationships could be compared to that between parents and their teenage children (when they work well). While the relationships were respectful and operated in a framework that was adult-to-adult, they were also warm and somewhat nurturing when required. Students, for example, called Māori staff

whaea and matua. Tutors made it clear that they were available to support the range of educational and social needs of students. Where students had got into trouble tutors encouraged students to think about their actions and worked with them to deal with their problems. They did not judge or lecture students in a way that made students feel small, dumb or helpless. In part, at least, the ‘adult-to-adult’, ‘parent-to-child’, ‘mentor-to-apprentice’ dynamics in the tutor-student relationships may explain why tutors did not need to have credentials to be effective at developing positive relationships with students. These were skills that have been developed in working with members of their own whānau.

The structured and individualised academic programmes

The Alternative Education providers placed importance on the academic work of students. In most cases the academic work of students was underpinned by materials from Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu/the Correspondence School (Te Kura), or an equivalent type of resource developed by the provider. The major focus of providers was on numeracy and literacy and, following on from this, the achievement of the National Certificate of Education Achievement Level 1, and/or the National Certificate of Employment Skills. In some instances students also focused on other academic courses such as science and te reo Māori.

Good practice by providers involved suitable group teaching alongside the individual student work on Te Kura type materials. Where tutors had the support and/or oversight of a suitably qualified teacher this was especially the case. In these instances providers demonstrated more understanding of the range of activities that could be used to engage students and how learning opportunities could be integrated into the work students carried out as part of the Te Kura studies.

In the best example, the tutors at Provider B ensured that the core work of Te Kura materials did not dominate the educational programme of students. They provided a higher proportion of optional work connected to music, the arts, Māori, history, social skills and Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC). Provider B also benefited from having pedagogical support from the consortium head teacher who supported the programmes put in place by tutors.

The benefits of using Te Kura materials were that the main educational materials in the class were linked to *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Specifically, the work undertaken by students was planned, delivered and assessed with reference to the levels of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. This was especially helpful given that most of the tutors were not trained teachers and lacked a full understanding of curricula, pedagogy and assessment.

The use of Te Kura materials allowed students to work at their own pace. This meant that each student could have their own programme, developed for their own capacity. Moreover, should a student be absent, then this would not affect the overall classroom teaching programme. When the student returned they could pick up where they had left off.

In addition to the use of Te Kura materials, the Alternative Education providers used a range of social, developmental and vocational learning. This varied with the providers, although health and physical education were often taught. Lifestyle skills, such as sewing and cooking made up part of the curriculum in some cases. Some students were able to access work experience and acquire their driver's licences. At some providers there were social studies activities, for example at Provider D term-by-term topics were covered such as The Winter Olympics and ANZAC Day (and its links to the Māori battalion).

Providers placed the social and developmental studies into a year plan as well as a day-to-day timetable. At Provider D this timetable included the specific activities that individual students would be following on that day and at that time. For example, each student knew which day they were to pursue either driver licence training, art, sport or Te Kura studies. At other times of the day there were whole class physical education or a social skills class.

Some of the activities that students took part in had specific Unit Standards attached to them, but others could be more 'experiential' and not formally assessed against *The New Zealand Curriculum* or New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) framework. Similarly, many of these activities could also reflect the goals that had been developed in a student's IEP. Alternatively activities such as cooking or sport may simply have been placed on the timetable because of the balance these subjects brought to the overall student learning programme.

Creating a future focus for students

An important unifying theme of the Alternative Education providers was the way they created a positive future focus for their students. Alternative Education providers helped to develop optimism for young people who could experience doubt, mistrust and even helplessness in response to their previous personal and educational challenges. Providers were also helping to overcome the 'live for today' approach to life that is as much a developmental issue for all adolescents as it is a feature of vulnerable youth. In turn, the future focus of students has helped them to see their studies as a means to an end and therefore built a platform for their motivation for learning.

He has struggled previously at other schools and his attendance was a huge issue. At [Provider F] he has attended everyday with great enthusiasm, he is happy, confident and getting more focused – [the provider] has encouraged him to be the best he can be and to further himself. Parent of child at Provider F

Alternative Education providers used several strategies to create an optimistic and positive future focus for students. Having developed good relationships, staff encouraged students to aspire to laudable goals. These were often long term and/or career based. At Provider F for instance, staff developed a concept of ‘stretch goals for students’. One student spoken to by ERO had developed a goal of becoming the number one kiteboarder in the world. He had already become the best in the South Island and he was working with staff to reach his next goal of getting to the National Championships. Another student’s goal was to become a head chef in his own kitchen. Staff at Provider F had helped this student to get into a STAR course in support of this goal.

Good academic outcomes and positive destinations

Alternative Education providers have produced many positive academic outcomes for students who had not found success in mainstream education. Most students in these Alternative Education providers had made academic progress during their time in Alternative Education, with many having achieved credits towards NCEA level 1 and/or NCES. For example at Provider A, all students were making progress towards NCEA. The students at this provider were also achieving at the highest levels across the consortium. ERO collected sample information on high, medium and low achievers.

- Student A – High achiever – 79 credits gained, 30 Unit Standards completed over 1 year
- Student B – Middle achiever – 61 credits gained, 23 Unit Standards completed over 2 years
- Student C – Lower achiever – 39 credits gained – 14 Units Standards completed over 1 year 4 months.

Provider A also had good processes for supporting the exit transitions of students. Through the consortium, the full-time coordinator worked with every student to explore their future options and develop plans for their next steps from Alternative Education. These plans were reviewed regularly and linked to each student’s IEP. Analysis from the consortium showed that, in 2009 and 2010, 71 percent of leavers from Provider A have either gone back to school or on to further training or employment.

Not all learners in Alternative Education are old enough and/or ready for NCEA Level 1 assessment tasks.⁷ In some cases, learners were still developing literacy and numeracy skills and talked with pride about their success. For example, one student at Provider A noted “I was illiterate – man I’ve improved so much. I couldn’t read before but now I can read a whole page!” Another student, at Provider F said “[I have] never done anything like this before and didn’t think I could.”

There was also some evidence that the students in these providers had more successful student destinations compared with national results for Alternative Education. Nationally, in 2009, just under 40 percent of students who left Alternative Education went on to a training course, returned to a mainstream school or took up employment.⁸

Evidence from providers that had analysed their own destination data showed much higher rates of such successful outcomes. For example Provider D had all of its students find successful destinations.⁹

The evidence collected from the other providers showed a more ad hoc approach to the analysis and use of destination data from providers and consortia. Staff could recall the destinations of students but there was no formal system for using this information to improve exit transitions and systems. The anecdotal reports from providers suggest that most students find a successful destination and that about five percent tended to ‘disappear off the radar’.

The pedagogical challenges for Alternative Education providers

Despite the good practice evident at these Alternative Education providers, ERO also found some common challenges regarding their pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. To some extent these challenges reflect an issue with the capacity of providers.

Pedagogical and curricula expertise

Most of the tutors in the Alternative Education providers did not have teaching backgrounds. Providers considered that the appointment of teachers was too expensive within the funding available. Without a teaching background tutors struggled to consistently provide the academic oversight to build student engagement. Tutors did not have the expertise to see links between curricula and integrate learning from one context to another. In the best situations, staff with teaching backgrounds provided an overview of the academic programme and were able to offer some enhancements to the teaching and learning. This was seen for example at Provider B where the consortium coordinator offered pedagogical models and support for tutors.

7 In some cases Year 10 students were expected to complete work that could qualify for NCEA level 1.

8 See Appendix 1.

9 Albeit that three students were initially referred to the tracing agency. Each of these students was successfully placed in further training.

Nevertheless the curriculum for students was primarily made up of skills-based work from Te Kura (or something equivalent) along with more vocational, lifestyle and interest-based options. In many ways the curriculum experienced by Alternative Education students could be considered conventional or traditional, in that the mornings (typically) reflected a concentration on academic studies from Te Kura and the afternoons tended to be devoted to social, cultural, vocational and interest-based activities, often individualised for each student. These programmes were conventional in the sense that they reflect both some typical aspects of mainstream schooling as well as some typical elements that might be expected in a work experience or Gateway class in senior secondary school.

Stronger pedagogical leadership could enhance student engagement and also engage the academic success of all the Alternative Education programmes. For example, use of authentic learning opportunities and contexts has the potential to make education more relevant for students and provide greater links between their career aspirations and their classroom activity.

The collection and analysis of assessment information

Providers had some systems in place for collecting assessment information. This included information on the number of Te Kura sets that had been completed by students as well as the unit standards students had completed with the provider. Some of the providers had information on student literacy and numeracy. In two cases literacy information was collected for the provider by a trained teacher. This information was often incorporated into the IEPs of students.

Outside of this functional monitoring of some assessment data, providers did not have systems for analysing the assessment information of students. As a result, providers did not have systems for reviewing their initiatives in relation to changes in student outcomes. They did not look closely at trends across student performance and identify improvements in the teaching and learning programme. In some ways this task would have been delegated to the staff at Te Kura who would have received much of the academic work of students. It is also a reflection of the limited pedagogical expertise of the tutors.

Exit transitions and IEPs

While Alternative Education providers were good at developing a future focus for students, they were less effective in developing Individual Education Plans (Provider B being the exception). Student IEP plans were functional in terms of the academic programmes that were operating at the providers, but they did not fully integrate with the goal-setting of students. Moreover, they tended to have too little focus on the exit transitions of students. As a result, exit transitions were not as well supported as they could have been.

Medium and long term outcomes

Neither the providers, consortia coordinators nor the Ministry of Education examined the medium and longer term outcomes of students leaving Alternative Education (although some providers had considerable anecdotal information).

While the destination data of students is aggregated by the Ministry, there are no monitoring or support structures for students in the months and years after they leave Alternative Education.

Given the resource and energy that goes into supporting students in Alternative Education the monitoring and support for student exit transitions is vital. While Alternative Education may give students a start on a positive pathway the resource that has been invested in this process is somewhat wasted if they do not continue to succeed when they leave. A greater focus on what happens to students who transition from Alternative Education may give policy-makers a better understanding of good practice in this area.

A FOCUS ON THE WHOLE STUDENT

One of the features of the work of the Alternative Education providers is their focus on many different aspects of students' lives and not just their academic success. The focus on the 'whole student' is not simply a philosophical approach, it is a necessity. Personal and social problems, drug abuse, violence and sexuality issues affect students' ability to learn. In many instances these problems are uppermost in the minds of students and need to be managed if students are to be engaged in education.

The focus on the whole student can be broken down into several different dimensions. The previous section comments on some of the academic focus of Alternative Education providers. In this section, the following headings are used to discuss the additional practices Alternative Education providers use to support students:

- a range of outcomes
- pastoral and social support
- engaging with whānau
- a Māori cultural focus
- learning support.

A range of outcomes

In focusing on the whole student, Alternative Education providers have valued a range of outcomes for students along with academic outcomes. These outcomes relate to aspects such as:

- attendance
- behaviour
- work ethic
- motivation
- engagement
- health and well-being
- optimism
- the development of essential skills
- social and cooperative skills
- a sense of belonging or commitment
- recreational and vocational skills.

Aside from attendance, these outcomes were understandably not quantified or systematically monitored by the providers. The emphasis providers placed on this wide range of outcomes was, nevertheless, important and helped students understand that they were being successful. The personal changes made by the young people in Alternative Education reflected a marked change from their disposition while in (or truant from) mainstream school. Something of this transformation can be seen in the comments made to ERO by students and parents.

I don't know where our son would be if [the Provider] was not here for us. Parent I can't believe how much I have changed – even my friends tell me I've changed. I so want to do well and get a job". Student at Provider E

[My whānau] want me to do well – they are right behind me, so I am determined to do well for my future. Student at Provider E

I love being here, it has turned me around. Student at Provider C

I didn't go to high school – went off with my mates, got drunk. Now I attend every day on time, I don't get drunk and get my work done. Student at Provider D

If I wasn't [here] I would probably be at home doing nothing. Student at Provider F

[I would be on the] streets doing hard out criminal things. Student at Provider F

Some of these comments reflect that students with criminal connections have lowered their levels of offending by attending Alternative Education. This was an anecdotal observation by staff at the providers. It was also noted in the feedback provided to Provider F staff by a Police Youth Aid Officer. Similarly, staff at Provider F had found a significant reduction in the number of agencies (such as Police and Child Youth and Family (CYF)) involved with a student because of the progress he was making in Alternative Education.

Pastoral and social support

Alternative Education providers used a wide range of support for students from various agencies. In this way Alternative Education providers operated as a type of ‘one stop shop’ for the personal problems of students. As discussed in the earlier section on relationships, staff go to great lengths to give students academic and social support and this includes working with appropriate professionals.

The types of agencies Alternative Education providers worked with in support of students included Church-based support services, Police Youth Aid, drug and alcohol services, Youth Workers, Praxis trainees,¹⁰ CYFs Social Workers, Youth Justice Co-ordinator, iwi social services, Life Education, Counsellors and Public Health Nurses. Staff at one provider noted that it could be very difficult to access mental health support for the young people in Alternative Education.¹¹

The links Alternative Education providers made with these various agencies helped them to coordinate the pastoral and social support students needed to learn. Staff at Provider A noted that working through a social crisis with a student could actually help to re-engage them in education. For example, a previously difficult student who became pregnant is now a responsible parent and has gone back to her academic studies – more motivated to achieve.

In another instance a student had assaulted a tutor. The tutor was willing to have the student back but with some clear conditions. Her willingness to give the student a second chance facilitated a ‘turn around’ for the student and she has gone on to achieve success in several areas.

Engaging with whānau

Most of the Alternative Education providers emphasised the importance of families in developing positive outcomes for students. Staff at Provider A, Provider F and Provider D emphasised that students were far more likely to be successful in Alternative Education where families value the work of Alternative Education providers. Practices that promoted good relationships with whānau included:

- the consortium coordinator and tutors visiting a student’s home as part of the enrolment process
- parents having the opportunity to contribute to their child’s IEP and transition plan, including taking part of any reviews of these documents
- visiting a student’s home when issues need to be discussed (eg face-to-face communication)
- tutors ringing parents periodically to share ‘good news’ about their son or daughter’s learning
- family being involved in social events (eg hāngi) and the programmes annual prize-giving/awards event.

10 Praxis is a network of Christian practitioners in youth and community work. It is registered with the NZ Qualifications Authority as a Private Training Establishment and offers courses in Youth and Community work. Trainees may do placements with Alternative Education centres. For more information about Praxis see <http://www.praxis.org.nz/>.

11 This may be an issue that affects students in mainstream schools too.

Anecdotal evidence from providers suggested that family involvement in Alternative Education may also contribute to students making a successful exit transition from Alternative Education. This is because parents have contributed to the exit transition process and understood their role in supporting the next steps for their child.

A Māori cultural approach

Earlier in this report the whānau quality of relationships between staff and students was discussed. This type of approach benefits students of all cultures in that it builds a sense of trust and belonging for students. Moreover, the day-to-day interactions of tutors and students valued what each student brought with them in terms of their personal strengths, interests and backgrounds.

In addition to these whānau approaches, specific elements of Māori culture were also explored by Alternative Education providers. The specific initiatives that contributed to the Māori cultural focus for the providers included:

- staff, whānau and students sharing meals
- learning te reo Māori as part of classroom studies
- participating in kapa haka and waiata
- students entering into Ngā Manu Kōrero speech competition
- using Māori protocol such as pōwhiri and karakia
- studying aspects of New Zealand's history
- providing hāngi as part of celebrations for parents and students.

One of the most compelling examples of a Māori approach was in how providers developed knowledge of Māori tikanga and reo. Providers used kaumatua and kuia to teach waiata, tikanga and reo. In some cases kaumatua and kuia were the tutors themselves and in other cases they visited from a local marae.

Because of the nature of their kaumatua and kuia expertise, a 'Māori pedagogical approach' was employed with students. This involved doing activities and talking about the relevant stories and history. These sessions could be rich learning activities for students. Students did not take notes and their learning was not linked to unit standards. These sessions were seen by providers as a way for Māori students in particular to be exposed to the wisdom of their culture in an authentic way, rather than in a traditional 'schooling' manner.

Learning support

The Alternative Education providers' focus on the whole student included support for the learning needs of students, especially the numeracy and literacy needs of students.

Interestingly, none of the staff in the Alternative Education providers discussed working with Group Special Education (GSE) or Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) in developing learning support for a student.¹² This is despite the fact that providers noted that there were many students with learning difficulties including behavioural problems. Conceivably support for these learning problems should have been organised through the managing and/or enrolling schools. One provider considered that they could not access such support because they were Alternative Education providers, rather than a school.

The lack of links to more specialist help meant that support for a student's academic development rested with the Alternative Education tutors. With the support of the consortium coordinator, one provider used an outside tutor to provide remedial support for those with the lowest levels of numeracy and literacy. This role worked so well for the provider that the consortium coordinator decided to extend the itinerant teacher's role. Generally other consortium coordinators have not been this 'hands on' in terms of learning support issues and this has been left with providers.

A common way in which the tutors have developed their skills has been by completing an adult literacy and numeracy qualification. As a result they have considered student development in terms of the adult learning progressions that are part of this approach. This approach showed some evidence of effectiveness given the improved reading results observed by ERO and the engaged approach of students to their literacy and numeracy studies.

LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND QUALITY SYSTEMS

Internal and external review

All the Alternative Education providers had useful internal and external review practices. These included formal audit-type processes as well as less formal processes that provider staff regularly used to monitor and review their performance and the learning of students.

The more formal review practices included:

- external audits by the consortium coordinator
- annual reports by the head tutors
- reviews by the corporate governance of providers (including NZQA requirements for accreditation)
- external reviews or audits by educational leaders from other institutions.

¹² Group Special Education and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour.

The formal internal and external review practices tended to provide compliance information about the work of the Alternative Education providers. They established whether providers were meeting the terms of their contract or other requirements, such as those linked to NZQA accreditation. Generally these review processes have not provided robust discussion about the teaching practices of the Alternative Education staff and the links these practices have to student educational outcomes.

Some of the more informal review approaches have provided useful information for improving the work of providers and thereby improving student outcomes. One such approach was the seeking of feedback from whānau members about the outcomes achieved by individual students. For example at Provider E, staff have collected information face-to-face to ensure that whānau members can discuss issues with staff members.

At Provider A useful quality assurance processes provided accountability information (eg meeting the terms of the contract) as well as an evaluation of programmes (based on the National Administrative Guidelines). The drivers for self review were the expectations, structures and systems put in place by the consortium coordinator. The coordinator's auditing experience helped to develop some effective planning and review practices. The consortium coordinator also made good use of review findings to establish annual priorities for professional development.

In some cases surveys were used by Alternative Education providers to collect information about the effectiveness of the programme. Provider F staff surveyed the external agencies to establish community perceptions about the effectiveness of the programme. Surveys were also circulated to parents when they attended the end of term hāngi. Provider F also used student surveys to identify their perspective on day-to-day operations.

Team meetings provided an important forum for discussing students and operational matters too. These were an important form of self review because they provided a way for specific day-to-day issues to be addressed. In this sense, the various complex personal and social issues of students were dealt with through a team approach by staff. Team meetings also gave staff an opportunity to discuss the specific progress made by each student and what enhancements could be made to improve their educational and social outcomes.

Leadership and teamwork

Providers demonstrated a wide variety of quality assurance systems, organisational development initiatives and professional development activities linked to improved student outcomes. These various processes need to be seen in the context of the leadership Alternative Education. The lead tutors, programme managers or directors of the Alternative Education programmes are vital in the coordination of what happens in Alternative Education. Because of the small, complex and whānau-like contexts of the Alternative Education providers, their leaders were important in ensuring the relationships and processes support student outcomes. The key competencies demonstrated in the effective leaders of the Alternative Education providers included:

- valuing and supporting education
- cultural competence
- counselling skills
- working with families
- problem-solving skills
- logistics organisation
- staff management
- budgeting, fund-raising and reporting
- working with external agencies (including schools).

In an overall sense, the leaders of Alternative Education providers needed to build a positive culture towards the vulnerable young people who were enrolled. Leaders discussed their approach to building a positive educational culture in different ways. The theme of this discussion was that leaders needed to develop organisations that had high levels of ‘compassion and passion’ for the lives and learning of young people. That is organisations that can understand and support students, while also remaining focussed on helping students achieve success in education.

Leaders were important for making sure that basic systems were in place for running day-to-day operations. This included the provision of lunch and making sure there was a workable timetable in place. They oversaw the development of the teamwork that was needed to respond to the range of issues brought by the educational and social backgrounds of students.

Leaders were also important in coordinating staff development. For example, leaders have helped several tutors to gain their qualifications in adult education. According to the Alternative Education leaders the completion of these qualifications has helped improve staff confidence and also contributed to their ability to support student learning. Learning has been improved by the increase in the number of teaching strategies tutors have used to engage students.

Links with managing schools and consortium coordinators

The links to managing schools were predominantly made through the consortium coordinators. As employees of the managing school they were the regular connection between school management and provider management. While some formal reporting processes were made by the provider to the managing school, the relationship between Alternative Education provider and the managing school could be described more as funder-provider rather than partners.

Effective coordinators provided important support to the Alternative Education providers. For instance, at Provider C the consortium coordinator provided leadership on the educational and vocational aspects of the provider's programme. The coordinator was also able to report on student achievement to the enrolling schools, thereby keeping them involved with the students they had in the programme.

At Provider B the coordinator actively worked with tutors to build their capacity for delivering the Alternative Education programme. The consortium had concerns about the sustainability of this approach because this position had been funded with the support of a one-off grant from the community.

At the Provider A programme the consortium also provided excellent assistance with the careers planning and exit transitions of Alternative Education students.

Links with enrolling schools

The links Alternative Education providers had with enrolling schools were minimal. The links between providers and enrolling schools were typically via the consortium coordinators. Enrolling schools were not usually involved in the transition of students to Alternative Education, for instance enrolling schools did not usually attend IEP meetings for students in Alternative Education.

Some enrolling schools were, however, known to be good schools for students' transition out of Alternative Education. These relationships were managed by the consortia coordinators. These relationships were cherished because there were reported to be several schools that did not welcome students who had previously been in Alternative Education.

Barriers faced by providers

As part of this evaluation, ERO asked Alternative Education providers what they saw as the barriers to students developing positive outcomes. The main barriers identified by all the providers were:

- **Personal circumstances/characteristics of students** – family background, student addictions (alcohol, drugs, gambling) and disruptive behaviour
- **Engaging with some families/whānau** – working with some families who have generations of “disconnection” from schools and education
- **Student “regression”** – the regression that can occur for students (in terms of behaviour, well-being and learning) over holiday periods and sometimes over weekends
- **Funding** – level of funding impacts on level of staffing, recruitment of staff and resources
- **Staffing** – concern about lack of funding to employ teachers and the difficulty faced in having to replace current tutors with people of similar quality should they leave.

In addition to the barriers that were discussed by each Alternative Education provider, other issues were identified by only some of the providers. These included:

- access to services, such as GSE, youth mental health and dental care
- not being recognised as a school and therefore not getting the same benefits¹³
- the relationship with CYF and the lack of support for some students
- uncertainty about learning pathways associated with Te Kura courses and how they lead to students gaining qualifications
- lack of achievement information supplied by enrolling schools when students start
- the age of some students on entry to programmes – providers note that there needs a minimum of 12 months working with student and families to have any significant impact in most cases. Some 15-and-half-year-old students have been referred to the programme and this has not been successful
- accommodation issues for the provider
- short term nature of Alternative Education contracts currently – affecting the ability of providers to retain staff (in other programmes) and undertake long-term planning
- difficulties and challenges of successfully reintegrating students back to their enrolling school, when students see this as what they want to do.

13 The benefits Alternative Education providers may miss out on compared to schools include access to Learning Media resources, computer (laptop) access, the provision of software, ERO reviews, professional development (School support services), school infrastructure budgets (capital expenditure), GSE and RTLB involvement and access to NZCER resources, such as the Assessment Resource Bank (ARBs).

Conclusions

The provision of high quality Alternative Education is dependent on several different factors. These factors set out below present an outline of those factors that supported the good practice of the providers in this evaluation. Following the presentation of these critical factors there is also a discussion about the ongoing challenges these Alternative Education providers face in maintaining quality provision. These challenges may or may not be evident for other Alternative Education providers, but they provide a framework for considering future investigations in this area.

THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Relationships between staff and students

The relationships between staff and students are central to the success of an Alternative Education provider. Staff need to develop the trust of students so that they can both work together to build positive outcomes for students. The factors that support good relationships include the culture and environment of the Alternative Education providers. The ability of staff to empathise with students and to connect to the social and cultural background they bring is an important aspect supporting these relationships and helping students feel that they belong.

A curriculum that matches student individual needs

The curriculum offered by the Alternative Education providers is strongly linked to the individual needs of students. The use of materials from Te Kura (or an equivalent developed by the provider) together with the other academic, recreational, health and vocational elements give students a sense of success.

Passion and compassion

Part of the positive culture that students enjoy at good Alternative Education providers is the care shown by the Alternative Education staff. Staff were passionate in their support of students and this affection helps create an authentic, whānau-like environment for students. It is the basis for the positive relationships between staff and students and the extra lengths tutors go to that helps address the range of needs shown by students.

It is important to note that the passion and compassion that tutors have for the lives of students provides a platform for positive outcomes. It is not enough on its own. Tutors still need to ensure that sound educational programmes are in place and that they work for each student.

Nevertheless, despite the complex educational and social issues that arise in connection with Alternative Education students, these passionate tutors often have greater success than teachers in the mainstream who have previously been unable to support these students.

A future focus

The future focus feature of effective Alternative Education providers is a motivating element of life and learning for students. The optimism engendered by staff through their encouragement, support and tutoring helps students to find a sense of success that many may not have experienced in education previously. The aspirational approach shown by the Alternative Education providers in this study helps students to find a new way to think about their lives and has helped many young people turn away from riskier ways of living.

A wrap-around approach

The wrap-around approach of Alternative Education providers is necessary to ensure that the variety of personal, social, health and educational needs of each young person are attended to. This means that Alternative Education providers need links to health, welfare and educational professionals. They also need the approaches, relationship and systems to identify when students need such additional help.

Leadership and teamwork

Leadership and coordination is needed to bring together the critical success factors in effective Alternative Education provision. This evaluation has identified that the leaders of Alternative Education programmes need to value education, have cultural competence, problem-solving skills, organisational skills, counselling skills, an ability to work with families, staff management skills, budgeting, fund-raising and reporting abilities and nous at dealing with external agencies, including schools. The skills required in leading and developing the culture and operations of an effective Alternative Education programme are multi-faceted and diverse.

Relationships with schools

A positive relationship between an Alternative Education provider and a constructive consortium coordinator can be very beneficial in supporting students in Alternative Education. Coordinators can provide some of the pedagogical leadership that may be lacking at an Alternative Education provider and they can also broker resources, such as careers guidance, from the managing school where required. Consortium coordinators are also in a good position to make links with enrolling schools, keeping them up to date with the progress made by any students they send to Alternative Education, and also working with schools willing to accept students wishing to return to mainstream schooling.

Relationships with whānau/families

In developing positive engagement between Alternative Education providers and students, and in developing positive exit transitions for Alternative Education students, it is important that Alternative Education providers have good relationships with the whānau of students. Positive relationships between Alternative Education providers and whānau helped produce better ‘teamwork’ between Alternative Education tutors and students’ families. In particular these relationships help to reinforce for students the value in Alternative Education and in their transition plan for when they leave Alternative Education.

KEY CHALLENGES FACING THE PROVIDERS IN THIS EVALUATION

Pedagogical leadership

Pedagogical leadership has the potential to enhance teaching and learning in Alternative Education. For the providers in this evaluation, pedagogical leadership could have further improved the integration of curriculum materials and the work of the tutors. Tutors could have made Te Kura materials more relevant and engaging for students. Similarly, it would have given tutors even more strategies to build engaging learning activities for students outside correspondence education.

More use could also be made of the IEPs for students. In many cases these were functional documents outlining a narrow range of goals for students. They were not always well linked to the ‘future focused’ goals of students and to the steps needed to build effective plans for students when they leave Alternative Education.

More pedagogical leadership would also have improved the analysis and use of assessment information at the Alternative Education providers. Many schools have difficulty in this area, so it is no surprise that Alternative Education tutors, most of whom do not have a teaching background, were unable to fully use assessment tools and analysis to improve the quality of the overall programme.

Developing positive exit transitions

A challenge facing the Alternative Education providers in this evaluation is in building high quality exit transitions for students. More work is needed to combine the academic and vocational trajectories of students into destinations that provide a foundation for student future success.

There are some system-wide barriers to the exit transitions of students. In the first instance there are questions about whether managing schools, enrolling schools or Alternative Education providers are responsible for the exit of students from Alternative Education. Other systemic issues include the age of students when they arrive and have to leave Alternative Education, the willingness of schools to enrol students from Alternative Education and the extent to which Alternative Education providers have had the time required to build a suitable exit plan for students.

There are also questions about what a good training programme might be for a student exiting from Alternative Education, especially if they have yet to develop qualifications. More work may be required by the Ministry and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to put in place pathways for Alternative Education students. Alternatively the Ministry and the TEC may need to do more work in helping providers understand just what pathways are currently available. Currently, many students go to youth training, and Manukau and Christchurch polytechnics have developed 'pre-tertiary' courses for students with a similar academic background to those in Alternative Education.

Aside from these systemic issues, a more integrated approach from Alternative Education providers to the academic and vocational pathways of students would also help develop student exit transitions. The challenge for providers is in making stronger links between exit transitions, IEPs and their 'whole student' focus. Ideally families are also fully engaged in this process too so that they can provide support for student pathways.

Appendix 1: Destination data for Alternative Education students 2009

The table below shows the percentage of ‘successful outcomes’ for students in Alternative Education in 2009.

The first section of the table shows all those who were in Alternative Education in 2009. Note that those students under the ‘open’ and ‘new placement’ categories continued on in Alternative Education in 2010.

The second section of the table adds up the successful outcomes of all leavers. This section excludes those who continued on in Alternative Education in 2010. Successful outcomes are a return to school, transition to a training course or employment.

All students in Alternative Education in 2009	No. of students
Correspondence School	22
Deceased	2
Detained in Custody	19
Employment	75
Excluded	32
In CYF (or other Agency) Care	47
Left NZ	65
New Placement (another Alternative Education provider)	132
Open (continued enrolment with Alternative Education)	795
Referred to tracing agency	786
Returned to (a regular) School	526
Training course	325
Turned 16 – finished schooling	590
Total number of students in AE in 2009	3416
Less those who left to a new (AE) placement	132
Continued their AE enrolment from 2008	795
Total number of leavers in 2009	2489

Outcomes of all leavers	No. of students		Percentage
	All Outcomes	Positive Outcomes	
Correspondence School	22		
Deceased	2		
Detained in Custody	19		
Employment	75	75	3.0%
Excluded	32		
In CYF (or other Agency) Care	47		
Left NZ	65		
Referred to tracing agency	786		
Returned to (a regular) School	526	526	21.1%
Training course	325	325	13.1%
Turned 16 – finished schooling	590		
	2489	926	37.2%

Source: Ministry of Education

Appendix 2: Alternative Education Indicator Framework

GOOD PRACTICE IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Student outcomes	
Educational outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students show signs of meaningful progress during their time at the provider. • Students are engaged and enjoy learning. • Students are achieving in national qualifications (age 14+). • Work samples provide evidence that students are achieving. • Families/whānau are satisfied with their child's achievement. • High priority given to achievement in literacy and numeracy. • Planning in literacy and numeracy is appropriate for meeting the specific requirements of each student. • Students initiate aspects of their own learning.
Social outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are healthy with any significant social or health issues supported by appropriate agencies.

Teaching programmes, practices and pedagogy

Quality of curriculum, planning and assessment

- Planning reflects the need to identify and develop the interests and strengths of students.
- Educational activities involve authentic problems that are relevant to students.
- Topics and themes link to situations outside the classroom context and are relevant to students.
- Students are able to investigate their own questions.
- Resources are appropriate, accessible and enhance the programme.
- Classroom activity is engaging and challenging for students, rather than ‘dumbed-down busy work.’
- Students receive high quality feedback on their learning.
- High quality career education and guidance is given with an emphasis on transition to the workplace or further education/training.

Identifying student needs

- The provider uses valid and reliable approaches to identify the educational strengths and weaknesses of students.
- The provider has sought and used the student’s point of view with regard to what supports their learning.
- The provider has processes in place for identifying and supporting the needs of students in relation to any physical, sensory, psychological, neurological, behavioural or intellectual impairments.
- The provider has culturally responsive processes to identify and support the needs and aspirations of Māori and Pacific students and their whānau/families.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• IEPs have clear goals for learning or development.• IEPs explain the processes to be used to support students to reach their goals.• IEPs are integrated into the exit transition of the student.• IEPs are regularly reviewed and revised in line with student progress and needs.• IEPs contain a plan for future education/employment.• IEPs contain an understanding of the student's exit transition and what has to happen to support that transition.• IEPs include an indication of what the young person wants to achieve in the residence to prepare them for their future; education/employment.
Pedagogy for at risk students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational activities involve authentic problems, and are relevant to students.• There are non-authoritarian and non-coercive classroom structures where power is shared between the student and teacher, eg classroom rule sharing, negotiated outcomes (excellence).• Staff support the development of student self-management.• Staff apply strategies to limit negative behaviour.• Topics and themes link to situations outside the classroom context and have some immediate relevance and meaning to students.• Students are able to investigate their own questions.• Students are able to work together in some situations, discussing ideas, reaching conclusions and teaching each other.• Students are taught to evaluate their own learning and are aware of their achievements and next steps.• Classroom activities take into account the individual needs of students.

Pedagogy for at risk students (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are clear goals and expectations for classroom activity and student work.• Staff have high expectations and express these often.• Learning is valued by staff and students.• There are close relationships between staff and students with adult educators operating as respected leaders and role models.• Staff understand and affirm the cultural backgrounds of the students (ie they are appreciated for their understanding of a variety of protocols, such as Māori, Pacific, Teenage).• Classroom activity is engaging and challenging for students, rather than ‘dumbed-down busy work’.
Pedagogical culture and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a warm, nurturing and safe atmosphere.• Humour is used to support the development of positive relationships among staff and students.• Teachers recognise that previous structures have not worked for these students.• Teachers recognise that motivation is likely to be a bigger challenge than ability for many students.• Teachers assume that students can succeed and are not fatalistic or judgemental about what a student may bring (socially or culturally) to the classroom.• Staff are compassionate, actively listening to students and reflecting their points of view.• Students express a sense of security and comfort with the environment.• Staff show enthusiasm about making a difference for students.• Staff demonstrate the importance of social and pastoral care as a pathway to support the achievement of students.

Student engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are engaged in discussions about their learning processes. • Students have an opportunity to explore their interests and strengths. • Students have clear and challenging goals or expectations for learning. • Students take responsibility for their own learning. • Students state that they enjoy their work and can say how it is relevant to their ongoing achievement.
Numeracy and literacy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning in literacy and numeracy is appropriate for meeting the specific requirements of each student. • Resources are appropriate, accessible and enhance the programme. • Students are positive about the progress they are making. • Students initiate aspects of their own learning. • Diagnostic assessments describe each young person's ability in reading (especially in decoding and comprehension), writing and numeracy. • A variety of relevant activities are used to support and increase student reading, writing and numeracy. • Oral language strategies are used to support language development. • Students receive positive feedback about their work. • Progress in numeracy and literacy is recognised and recorded in IEP documentation.
Quality processes	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to ERO's indicators for schools (Leading and Managing the school, pg 29).

External relationships	
Relationships with external agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider's staff work collaboratively with agencies such as health, iwi, and Non Government Organisations (NGO) to support the multiple needs of students.
Relationships with the enrolling schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider works with the enrolling school to ensure the best possible outcome for each student. Processes are in place to provide the enrolling school with information about a student's progress at the provider. The provider and the enrolling school work together in developing an IEP and career pathway for each student.
Relationships with the managing school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider and the managing school form a supportive partnership in working through issues relevant to the Alternative Education service.
The use of the Correspondence School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of the TCS supports students to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to positively transition from the Alternative Education provider.
The links to other training providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Alternative Education provider has positive relationships with other training providers that support students to have a positive transition from Alternative Education.
Links with families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whānau/families are included so that they can support the ongoing development of their child or young person. The exit transition includes adequate support for whānau/families to provide suitable support for the ongoing development of students once they have left the provider.

Exit transition

- The student's destination is monitored and recorded.
- The exit outcomes of students are analysed to inform the quality of future exit processes for students.
- Exit transition planning is based on the progress students have made.
- The exit transition planning details the types of support students will receive for their ongoing learning and development.
- The exit transition includes clear roles and responsibilities for the student and those supporting the student after they leave the provider.

Appendix 3: Report feedback form

Good practice in Alternative Education

The information in this box is optional	
Name:	
School/Institution:	
Your role: (for example, Teacher, Parent, Trustee, Researcher, Principal)	
Address:	

Please help ERO evaluate the quality of this report. By sending ERO your views on this report you are contributing to the quality of future national reports.

*Please send your comments by email to info@ero.govt.nz; by fax to the following number: 0-4-499 2482; or post to: **Evaluation Services, Education Review Office, Box 2799, Wellington 6140** (Freepost authority number 182612).*

- How readable is this report? (language, structure and content) Indicate one of the following:

Highly readable		Fair		Not very readable
5	4	3	2	1

- Were there any aspects or sections of this report that were difficult to understand?
Yes / No

If yes, what sections or aspects were difficult to understand?

3. *For school personnel:* How useful is this report in helping you identify ways to improve your work with vulnerable students? Indicate one of the following:

Highly useful		Moderately		Not very useful
5	4	3	2	1

4. Which aspects of this report provided the most useful information about schools and Alternative Education?

5. What improvements could be made to make future reports more useful for teachers, principals and board members?

6. Any other comments? If you have any other suggestions or comments about the quality or content of this report, or about how this report has been used by you or your school, please include them below.

Thank you for completing this form. The information you provide will be used to reflect on how future national reports are prepared by the Education Review Office.

Education Review Offices

CORPORATE OFFICE – TARI RANGATŌPŪ

Level 1, Sybase House
101 Lambton Quay
PO Box 2799
Wellington 6140
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482
info@ero.govt.nz

TE UEPŪ Ā-MOTU

Māori Review Services
c/o Corporate Office
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482
erotu@ero.govt.nz

NORTHERN REGION – TE TAI RAKI

Auckland

Level 5, URS Centre
13-15 College Hill
Ponsonby
PO Box 7219, Wellesley Street
Auckland 1141
Phone: 09 377 1331 Fax: 09 373 3421
auckland@ero.govt.nz

Moana Pasefika

c/o Auckland Office
Phone: 09 377 1331 Fax: 09 373 3421
auckland@ero.govt.nz

Hamilton

Floor 4, ASB Building
214 Collingwood Street
Private Bag 3095 WMC
Hamilton 3240
Phone: 07 838 1898 Fax: 07 838 1893
hamilton@ero.govt.nz

CENTRAL REGION – TE TAI POKAPŪ

Napier

Level 1, Dundas House
43 Station Street
Box 4140
Phone: 06 835 8143 Fax: 06 835 8578
napier@ero.govt.nz

Whanganui

Education House
249 Victoria Avenue
PO Box 4023
Whanganui 4541
Phone: 06 345 4091 Fax: 06 345 7207
whanganui@ero.govt.nz

Wellington

Revera House
48 Mulgrave Street
Wellington 6011
PO Box 27 002
Marion Square
Wellington 6141
Phone: 04 381 6800 Fax: 04 499 2482
wellington@ero.govt.nz

SOUTHERN REGION – TE TAI TONGA

Christchurch

39 Princess Street
Christchurch 8041
P O Box 25102
Christchurch 8041
Phone: 03 378 7351 Fax: 03 366 7524
christchurch@ero.govt.nz

Dunedin

Floor 9, John Wickliffe House
265 Princes Street
Dunedin 9016
PO Box 902
Dunedin 9054
Phone: 03 479 2619 Fax: 03 479 2614
dunedin@ero.govt.nz

