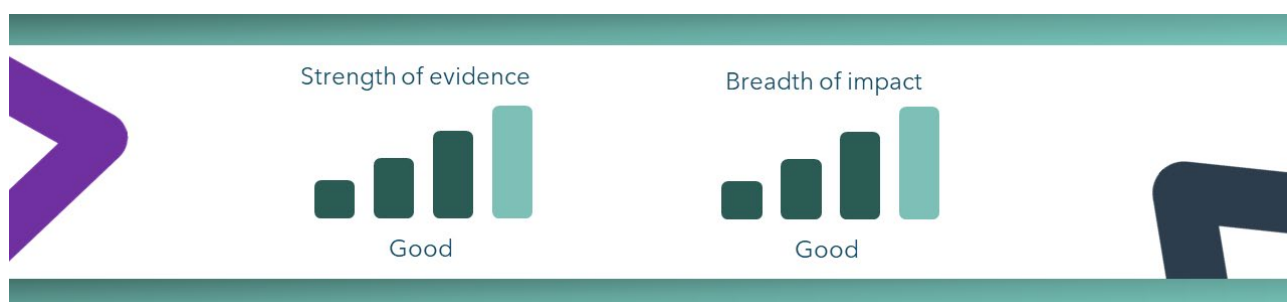


Effective Practice case study: Telford & Wrekin's Key Stage 1-3 Alternative Provision Outreach Intervention Model

Summary

Telford & Wrekin Council's work began in response to high suspension rates and increasing social and emotional need across mainstream schools. Leaders recognised that traditional behaviour support approaches were no longer sufficient and that a cultural shift was needed to strengthen early intervention and prevent escalation. The co-produced Belonging Strategy provided the foundation for this shift, establishing shared principles - most notably that exclusion is rarely the right outcome - and creating a unified direction for mainstream schools and the local authority (LA). From this foundation, the LA developed a coordinated outreach model focused on early intervention and building capacity in mainstream schools. Key elements include the pre-suspension hotline, enhanced behaviour audits, the Seven Steps to Belonging Relational Practice Framework, and a school residency model.

The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework¹ considers that the "strength of evidence" of this case study is **good** – the model has been sustained for over five years, embedded across the system, with routine internal monitoring demonstrating impact. Although not independently evaluated, its longevity, replication and credible outcomes provide a strong evidence base. The "breadth of impact" of this case study is **good** – there is evidence of impact in three of the four impact areas: the lived experiences of children and young people with SEND², demonstrated through direct pupil voice; positive feedback from professionals, reflected in strong and consistent qualitative evidence from schools; and quantifiable education and wellbeing outcomes, demonstrated through suspension-prevention data and intervention scores.



¹ The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework uses two "signal strength" indicators to present the strength of evidence and the breadth of impact of a case study. Each indicator has four bars – emerging, promising, good and robust. The "strength of evidence" indicator is based on how the project has been evaluated and the length of time it has been sustained. The "breadth of impact" indicator is based on whether the case study can demonstrate impact in four broad areas – the more areas of impact, the higher the signal strength indicator.

² For ease of reading, we use the term 'SEND' to refer to disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs.

Why was this work undertaken? What did the work aim to do?

Historically, Telford & Wrekin faced a long-standing challenge of high suspension rates significantly above the national average - with data showing this trend dating back to 2007. These patterns reflected both the rising complexity of children and young people's social and emotional needs, and the wider contextual challenges affecting families across the borough. At the same time, mainstream schools increasingly reported that the approaches traditionally used to support children and young people were no longer sufficient for the level of need they were experiencing and expressed the need for evidence-based relational support. This created a clear opportunity for the area to strengthen early intervention and build the capacity of mainstream schools to address needs before they escalated.

In response to these challenges, Telford & Wrekin developed the Belonging Strategy in 2019 as a deliberate system-wide shift from exclusion to inclusion, partnership and shared accountability. Co-produced with education partners including Headteachers, Multi-Academy Trusts and Governors, the strategy set out a clear vision for belonging across all settings, underpinned by priorities including universal belonging, social, emotional and mental health, early multi-agency support, smooth transitions and targeted intervention. A core principle agreed across the partnership was that suspensions and permanent exclusions are rarely the right outcome for children and young people, and that schools and the local authority must work together to prevent them. This shared commitment laid the foundations for a new outreach model focused on early identification and preventing fragmented support, further strengthened by the Rarely Exclusion guidance introduced in 2023.

Structural decisions taken by the local authority also played a crucial role. Following national funding reforms in 2010, Telford & Wrekin chose to retain its Behaviour Support Advisory Team (BSAT) when many areas reduced or disbanded similar non-statutory services. Transitioning the BSAT to a traded-model ensured sustainability and continuity. In 2020, the local authority relocated its BSAT into the Linden Centre Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). This move was intentional: leaders wanted a fully integrated model where behaviour support and alternative provision operated as a single, coherent system. By co-locating the BSAT within the PRU, this enabled shared leadership, consistent practice standards, joint training opportunities, and most importantly - a unified vision for preventing exclusions. It meant that children and young people at-risk were far less likely to fall between services, and that support could be delivered earlier, more consistently and in a more connected way across the system.

The Key Stage 1 - 3 Alternative Provision outreach intervention model therefore set out to achieve two main aims:

1. Provide intervention to pupils at the earliest point possible to reduce escalation of need.
2. Build capacity in schools to support pupils to remain in mainstream education.

What were the key actions and practices involved?

Telford and Wrekin's Key Stage 1 - 3 Alternative Provision outreach intervention model focuses on seven key actions:

- ✦ The Pre-suspension Hotline
- ✦ Enhanced behaviour audits
- ✦ The Seven Steps to Belonging Relational Practice Framework
- ✦ Upskilling the workforce through bespoke training
- ✦ The Residency Model
- ✦ Providing targeted support for pupils and families
- ✦ Year 6 into 7 Transition Programme

The Pre-suspension Hotline

The BSAT is comprised of a team of Inclusion Mentors, trained in a range of strategies to support pupils and mainstream schools. The Pre-suspension Hotline is a core preventative element of the BSAT model, offering schools immediate support at the point they are considering suspending or excluding a pupil. Inclusion Mentor's staff the hotline, taking calls from Headteachers seeking urgent guidance. Schools receive a free 30-minute consultation per child each term. Inclusion Mentors support leaders to reflect on contributing factors, consider whether all preventative measures have been taken, and re-centre their thinking when situations feel heightened. In many cases, simply providing a reflective space for Headteachers to be heard and reconnect with the principles of relational practice is enough for de-escalation.

After initial calls, Inclusion Mentors access the education and social care databases to understand any relevant contextual or safeguarding factors and, where needed, offer an immediate on-site visit. These visits may involve working directly with pupils, 30-minute 'solution circle's' involving the pupil and key staff to generate shared actions and practical strategies, and reflective conversations about school practice, helping staff make small but crucial adjustments that prevent future escalation.

All Pre-suspension Hotline support is free to schools. If longer-term work is required, Inclusion Mentors advise on three or six-week intervention packages, which schools can choose to commission or deliver independently using BSAT-supplied materials, ensuring flexibility and continuity of support.

Enhanced behaviour audits

As part of their traded-offer, the BSAT developed an enhanced behaviour audit tool to support mainstream schools to understand how their practice, behaviour culture, and routines are functioning in day-to-day practice. Before school visits take place, Headteachers complete a detailed self-evaluation using a pro-forma developed through the Belonging Strategy and informed by the Rarely Exclusion guidance. This enables Inclusion Mentors to identify key areas for exploration and to understand any presenting concerns in advance. During the audit, Inclusion Mentors gather evidence through classroom observations, learning walks, reviews of wrap-around care, behaviour policies and curriculum, and discussions with pupils, leaders, teaching and support staff. They also analyse exclusion and contextual data as well as safeguarding information to build a full picture of systemic and environmental factors influencing behaviour. This process enables the BSAT to triangulate schools' self-evaluation's with on-site findings, ensuring an accurate and nuanced understanding of strengths and areas for development.

Following the visit, the BSAT produces a comprehensive report that outlines the school's current stage using the 'focusing, developing, establishing and enhancing' descriptors, adapted from the Assessment for Learning Framework 4 Self-Evaluation Tiers. The report highlights strengths, areas for development, and provides specific, practical recommendations tailored to the school's context. Recommendations often involve small but high-impact adjustments to routines, relational approaches, language, environment, or staff structures. Where relevant, the report also connects findings to the BSAT's wider offer and includes recommendations such as targeted interventions, staff training or additional mentoring which schools can commission from the BSAT traded-offer. Schools use the report as a clear roadmap for strengthening inclusion, improving consistency and embedding preventative practice across their community.

The Seven Steps to Belonging Relational Practice Framework

Seven Steps to Belonging is Telford & Wrekin's flagship relational practice framework and a central strand of the BSAT's work to strengthen whole-school inclusion. Developed locally, it provides a high-level structure that helps mainstream schools create the conditions in which all pupils feel safe, connected and able to thrive, and to embed consistent preventative practice. The first six steps focus on universal expectations: shaping the everyday language, routines, relationships and behaviour systems that pupils experience; step seven offers a structured route to targeted intervention, used only when strong universal foundations are firmly in place. The BSAT supports schools to embed the Seven Steps through training, modelling and coaching, enabling staff to apply relational principles consistently and confidently so that belonging becomes woven through behaviour, inclusion and wellbeing practices. Importantly, the training is low-cost, in line with the BSAT's wider universal offer, ensuring that all schools can access and embed the framework without financial barriers.

Upskilling the workforce through bespoke training

The BSAT designs flexible training packages aligned to each schools' needs. The offer is extensive and bespoke, covering whole-school approaches, classroom practice, de-escalation, restorative approaches and wellbeing. Topics include *Behaviour is Communication*, *Positive Behaviour Management in the Classroom*, *SEND and Behaviour in the Classroom*, *Managing Anxiety in Young People*, and *Lunchtime Supervisor Behaviour Training*, alongside specialist training on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Autism. Inclusion Mentors also deliver practical intervention training such as Sand Therapy, LEGO Build to Express and the Crisis Prevention Institute's Safety Intervention programme. All training is delivered through BSAT's traded-offer, with low-cost, accessible pricing to ensure affordability for all schools.

The Residency Model

The Residency Model provides schools with regular on-site access to a BSAT Inclusion Mentor, offering consistent relational support for pupils and ongoing professional guidance for staff. As part of this model, Inclusion Mentors deliver a flexible blend of one-to-one work, small-group interventions, observations and reflective coaching with staff to address emerging needs. A key element of this approach is Claire's Cafe, a drop-in model where pupils and staff can seek informal support. It provides a nurturing space where pupils can access food and connect with a trusted adult for conversations, de-escalation or problem-solving, while staff use the space for consultation and advice around pupil needs. Claire's Cafe enhances early identification, strengthens relationships, and mirrors the nurturing ethos of the Linden Centre within mainstream settings.

The Residency Model is a valuable mechanism for strengthening whole-school practice. Inclusion Mentors engage with leadership teams to discuss emerging patterns, contribute to behaviour planning, and model relational approaches, supporting staff to make adjustments that improve the day-to-day experience for pupils. The Residency Model – anchored by the accessibility of Claire's Cafe – supports earlier identification of need, prevents escalation, strengthens school capacity and embeds relational practice across the setting. Schools typically commission a half-day or full-day each week as part of the BSAT's traded-offer, with costs scaled to remain accessible for schools. To ensure equity, the BSAT offers the Residency Model free of charge to four secondary schools experiencing the highest levels of social and emotional need, funded by the local authority.

Providing targeted support for pupils and families

Schools can request bespoke support from the BSAT. This support begins with a pre-visit and a conversation with parents or carers to understand the child or young person's experiences, strengths and wider contextual factors. Inclusion Mentors then observe the pupil in class and work collaboratively with staff to explore the best approach to support: direct intervention with the child or young person, or classroom or wider whole-school practice. Following this, Inclusion Mentors design a tailored package of support ranging from one-to-one sessions, small-group interventions, staff coaching or targeted interventions drawn from the BSAT's Therapeutic Toolkit (200+ interventions). Where adjustments to practice are required, Inclusion Mentors model relational approaches and offer practical guidance to strengthen consistency and confidence across the school. This support is offered through the BSAT's traded-model, with schools commissioning accessible three or six-week packages, or choosing to deliver interventions themselves using BSAT-provided materials at no additional cost. All support recommendations are recorded via a duplicate-form system, ensuring clarity and enabling schools to sustain the work independently once the BSAT involvement ends.

The BSAT also offers a parent programme that supports families to explore the drivers behind behaviour and develop shared, consistent strategies across the home and school environment. Delivered through a series of workshops, Inclusion Mentors build parents' confidence in approaches such as de-escalation, communication and emotional regulation, creating space for reflection and practical problem-solving. Originally piloted through PINS funding, the BSATs adapted 'Behaviour is Communication' programme received positive parent feedback and has since expanded as part of their traded-offer - which schools can commission. Demand for the parent programme has grown and the BSAT is working closely with local Parent Carer Forums to widen access and co-develop further support tailored to families' needs.

The Year 6 into 7 Transition Programme

The BSAT delivers a targeted Transition Programme to support pupils who may be vulnerable when moving from Year 6 to Year 7, ensuring early identification of need and continuity of support. Pupils are identified through: school referrals, the Fair Access Panel, previous BSAT involvement where relational continuity is crucial, and following completion of a 12-week PRU placement where additional transition oversight is appropriate. The six-week programme is delivered twice weekly in primary schools and focuses on managing anxiety, preparing for secondary routines, emotional regulation and problem-solving.

In the summer term, Inclusion Mentors accompany pupils to their new secondary school to meet key staff, build early relationships and agree approaches that will support pupils to settle into new routines and expectations. Check-ins continue into Year 7 to provide a familiar point of contact as pupils adjust to the new school environment, and to ensure pupils are well supported during the initial transition phase. This support helps pupils feel more confident about the move and enables schools to establish positive relationships from the outset. The programme has 100% uptake from both primary and secondary schools and is included within the BSAT traded-offer, with commissioning shared across both phases.

What was the impact?

The project has been able to demonstrate impact in three of the four areas captured by the SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework. There is evidence of impact in terms of the lived experience of children and young people with SEND, positive feedback from professionals, and quantifiable education and wellbeing outcomes.

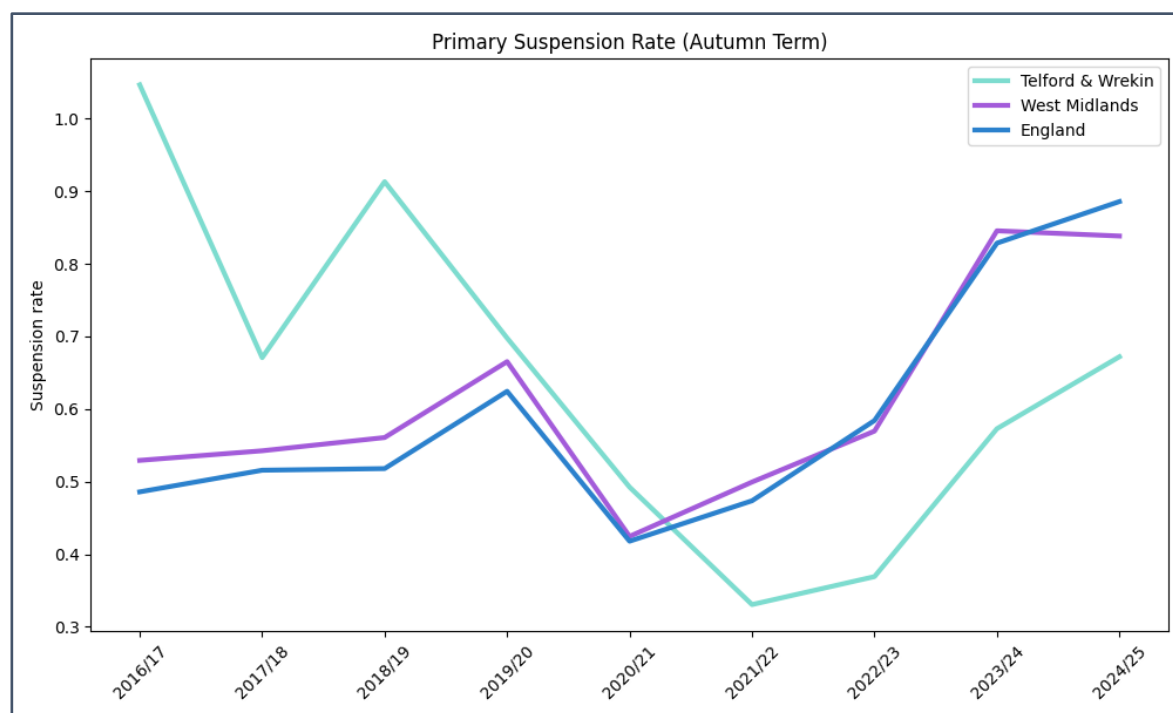


- ✓ Lived experience of children and young people with SEND and their families
- ✓ Education, health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people
- ✓ Feedback from professionals

Long term outcomes for children and young people



The suspension data shown in the graph below demonstrates a clear pattern of improvement for primary-aged pupils in Telford & Wrekin. Although the area previously recorded higher suspension rates than both regional and national averages, suspension rates have reduced significantly over time and now sit consistently below these comparators. This reduction aligns with the introduction of the Belonging Strategy and the wider Alternative Provision outreach model, which have strengthened early identification and enabled schools to respond more effectively at the point concerns emerge.



Source: [DfE \(2025\), Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions in England, EES.](#)

Providing early intervention to reduce escalation of need

Through strengthening early intervention at the point schools are considering a suspension or exclusion, the Pre-suspension Hotline has enabled timely, proportionate responses and reduced escalation for a significant number of pupils. This approach ensures the local authority provides consistent, preventative support to schools and pupils as part of a coordinated offer within the wider outreach model. The data below demonstrates the scale and effectiveness of the hotline.

- Of the 377 Pre-suspension Hotline calls taken in 2024:
 - 146 resulted in an on-site visit, ensuring rapid support for mainstream settings during critical moments.
 - Of these calls, 100 short-breaks were arranged, offering structured early support for pupils as an alternative to suspension and allowing schools to reintegrate pupils.
 - A total of 139 suspensions were prevented, with only 12 suspensions and 5 exclusions issued following hotline involvement.
- Of the 348 Pre-suspension Hotline calls taken in 2025:
 - 124 resulted in an on-site visit.
 - 82 short-breaks were arranged.
 - A total of 116 suspensions were prevented, with 13 suspensions and 6 exclusions issued following hotline involvement.

This demonstrates that the hotline is providing early intervention at scale, enabling schools to access immediate relational and practical support, and significantly reducing the number of cases escalating to formal exclusion routes.

School leaders highlight the value of receiving expert guidance at the critical point of considering exclusion. The quotes below demonstrate how immediate, practical advice enabled schools to reflect and adjust their approach, prevent suspensions that previously felt inevitable and maintain placements for pupils at risk.

"The support we received enabled a child who was on the brink of exclusion to remain successfully in school. The strategies shared were practical, immediate and genuinely life-changing for that pupil."

"Your advice helped us adjust our approach to one pupil, and it prevented what would have been their third suspension this year."

"The hotline advice was invaluable. Having access to timely, skilled guidance meant we prevented a suspension that felt inevitable just days earlier."

"The strategies shared were practical, immediate and genuinely life-changing for that pupil."

- Headteachers across Telford & Wrekin

Inclusion Mentors provide timely, targeted support to pupils at the first signs of emerging need. They play a crucial role in supporting pupils to feel understood and supported and to help them build the skills and confidence they need to navigate challenges before they escalate.

Across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years, Inclusion Mentor interventions have demonstrated clear progress for pupils receiving support. Using a solution-focused scale (0-10) to assess pupils' resilience and confidence to navigate challenges in the school environment, pre- and post-intervention scores were recorded for 377 pupils. The data below indicates a strong pattern of positive change for pupils receiving support at the first signs of emerging need.

- ★ Average scores increased from 2.57 to 7.06, indicating a strong and meaningful uplift across the cohort.
- ★ All pupils in 2023-24 and over 99% in 2024-25 recorded an improvement, demonstrating the consistency of this approach.
- ★ More than 50% of pupils achieved gains of five points or more, and 82 pupils who began with very low baseline scores (0-1) progressed to 5 or above following intervention.

These outcomes demonstrate the impact of providing early, targeted support to reduce escalation of need and strengthen pupils' capacity to engage successfully in school.

Pupil feedback highlights the strong impact of early, relationship-based support from Inclusion Mentors. Pupils consistently describe feeling understood, supported and better equipped to manage challenges. The quotes below illustrate how this approach helps pupils feel safe, valued and able to remain engaged in school.

"It's the first time I've felt understood by an adult in school."

"I used to think no one listened, but they really do. That's why I talk to them."

"They don't judge me for my mistakes - they help me learn from them. Clare came in to my old school and helps me in my new one"

"If I'm having a bad day, they help me stop it turning into a really bad day. We use scales to help me"

"School feels less scary because I know they're there if it gets too much."

"They helped me figure out what triggers me and how to deal with it."

"If it wasn't for my mentor, I probably wouldn't still be in school. They've helped me keep going."

"They've helped me build better relationships with teachers and friends."

"They just make sense. They are real normal people. They helped me see that my behaviour makes sense and that I can change it."

- Pupils from KS1-KS4 supported by Inclusion Mentors

During the 2025-26 cohort of the Year 6 into 7 Transition Programme, no pupils went on to receive a suspension or exclusion. Pupil feedback shows how this support strengthened their confidence, reduced anxiety about the move and helped them settle into secondary routines while staying regulated in a new environment.

"At first I thought secondary was gonna be too much and I'd mess it up, but the transition group helped me get used to it bit by bit. Now I actually get to lessons on time and I haven't been sent out once this term."

"I used to get really angry thinking about moving schools, but having people I already knew and places I could go made it easier. I still get stressed sometimes, but I know what to do now and I stay in class."

"I didn't think I'd last in Year 7, but the support helped me feel better. I've got a couple of mates and I'm doing my work more. I'm not getting into trouble like before."

"My mentor actually listens. Not just to what I say, but how I say it. Darren supported me in Primary and still now."

- Pupils supported through the Transition Support Programme

Overall, the evidence indicates that early-intervention approaches across the pre-suspension hotline, Inclusion Mentor work and transition support is successfully reducing escalation of need and preventing cases from progressing to suspension or exclusion. Timely, relational support is strengthening pupil regulation and maintaining engagement. Together, these outcomes demonstrate a strong and consistent impact on reducing escalation at the earliest point of emerging needs.

Building capacity in schools to support pupils to remain in mainstream education.

The BSAT training offer has strengthened capacity in mainstream schools by equipping staff with the knowledge, confidence and practical strategies to respond earlier and more effectively when concerns arise.

Schools describe a clear shift towards interpreting behaviour as communication and responding with understanding rather than consequences. The quotes below demonstrate how this reframing is helping schools identify needs earlier and make adjustments that sustain inclusion in mainstream settings.

"The Behaviour as Communication training has transformed how our staff understand pupil behaviour. We've seen a noticeable reduction in crisis incidents because staff now respond with curiosity instead of consequence."

"Our teachers now feel much more confident in identifying unmet needs behind behaviour. The training has had a direct impact on the stability of some of our most vulnerable pupils."

"A child who used to be sent home regularly is now fully included - all because we shifted to understanding their behaviour rather than punishing it."

"Your team's training allowed us to reframe a child's behaviour and put appropriate adjustments in place. The child is now thriving, and exclusion is no longer being discussed."

"The trauma-informed approach helped me understand a pupil who had been misunderstood for years. We've had no further suspensions since the training."

- Feedback from Headteachers and school staff across Telford & Wrekin

Schools highlight the practical value of the training, noting that staff can apply the strategies immediately to support pupils more effectively. The quotes below demonstrate how these approaches have helped to prevent escalation, keep pupils engaged in the classroom and embed consistent, nurturing routines across school settings.

"The strategies were so practical. I used them the very next day, and it prevented an escalation that would usually lead to removal from lesson."

"Understanding behaviour as communication has helped me support a child who was regularly leaving the room. He now stays in class, engages, and trusts us again."

"The practical strategies shared during the training have become part of our everyday practice."

"The training was engaging and rooted in real-life scenarios. Staff left with strategies they could use the very next day."

- Feedback from Headteachers and school staff across Telford & Wrekin

Leaders and practitioners report greater staff confidence and a clear cultural shift following the training. The quotes below demonstrate how this change has improved consistency, translated into fewer escalations and empowered staff to respond proactively. Together, they reflect strengthened school environments where staff feel equipped, aligned and capable of supporting pupils in mainstream education.

"The training shifted our culture. Instead of reacting to behaviour, we now seek to understand it."

"Our pastoral team felt completely supported and energised after the session. It reinforced our inclusive ethos and gave us new tools to support challenging pupils."

"Following your training, staff consistency has improved dramatically. Our behaviour data shows fewer escalations and more proactive interventions."

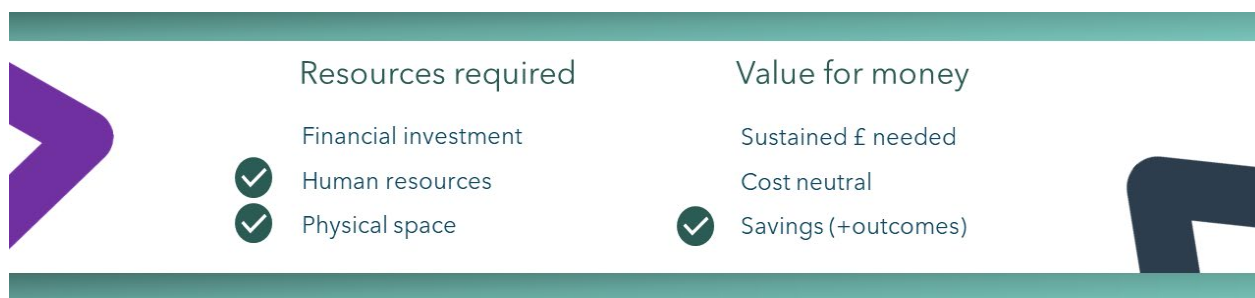
"We have seen a noticeable difference in staff empathy and understanding. This has created a calmer, more nurturing environment for pupils who struggle."

"The practical examples made everything click. I left feeling empowered, not overwhelmed."

- Feedback from Headteachers and school staff across Telford & Wrekin

Overall, the feedback demonstrates strong capacity-building across settings, with BSAT training contributing to more confident staff, more consistent practice and more effective early intervention to keep pupils successfully included in mainstream education.

How has the work been sustained?



Implemented in 2020, the Key Stage 1-3 Alternative Provision outreach intervention model is now embedded as business as usual. The approach is grounded in the belief that early relational support prevents needs from escalating to suspension or exclusion. Value for money is demonstrated through savings and improved outcomes, as upstream support reduces the likelihood of pupils requiring more costly placements later on. Sustainability has been prioritised, with BSAT staff employed in permanent roles and co-located within the Linden Centre Pupil Referral Unit, ensuring consistent practice and a stable operational base.

The model is maintained through a blend of traded-income and targeted local authority (LA) funding. Most BSAT training, interventions and residency support are delivered as low-cost traded-services, while the LA funds free residency support for the four secondary schools with the highest level of need, ensuring financial stability and equitable access. Through Change Programme funding, the LA has also extended the model into Key Stage 4, creating a consistent continuum from primary school to Year 11. The LA plans to sustain this beyond the programme by building it into the Key Stage 4 Alternative Provision budget funded through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

The LA monitors progress through pre- and post-intervention scaling, regular school follow-up, and an annual report to the Fair Access Panel as part of the end-of-year review. This ongoing evaluation enables the team to refine practice and maintain consistent outcomes.

This work is relevant to any local area seeking to build a sustainable Alternative Provision outreach model, strengthen relational practice across the workforce and maintain a coordinated, preventative approach to reducing exclusions.

Finding out more

Contact to find out more	Andy Cooke - Service Delivery Manager, Alternative Provision, Telford & Wrekin Council. andy.cooke@telford.gov.uk Darren Lennon - Headteacher & Behaviour Support Advisory Team Leader, The Linden Centre. darren.lennon@telford.gov.uk
Useful resources and links	Telford & Wrekin's Belonging Strategy The Linden Centre