

OxPCF and Oxfordshire County Council Alternative Education Provision Listening Event

Introduction

The Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum (OxPCF) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) hosted an Alternative Education Provision (AEP) Listening Event in March 2025 following significant feedback on the challenges and successes families experience with AEP.

The event brought together parent carers to share experiences, highlight what is working well, explore key challenges, and identify priorities for improvement. Insights were gathered via Mentimeter and breakout room discussions, providing a rich, collaborative space for open dialogue.

Key Attendees:

Oxfordshire County Council:

- Martyn Rawlinson
- Emma Redman
- Lan Jenner

SENDIASS:

- Wendy Cliffe: (SENDIASS Manager)
- Jo Robinson: (SENDIASS Adviser)
- Kathryn Smith (SENDIASS Adviser)

OxPCF:

- Jules Francis-Sinclair: (Chair)
- Anna Traer (Parent Rep)

Please see below for summaries of the discussions, Q&A highlights, and confirmed next steps.

Your Experience of AEP in Oxfordshire

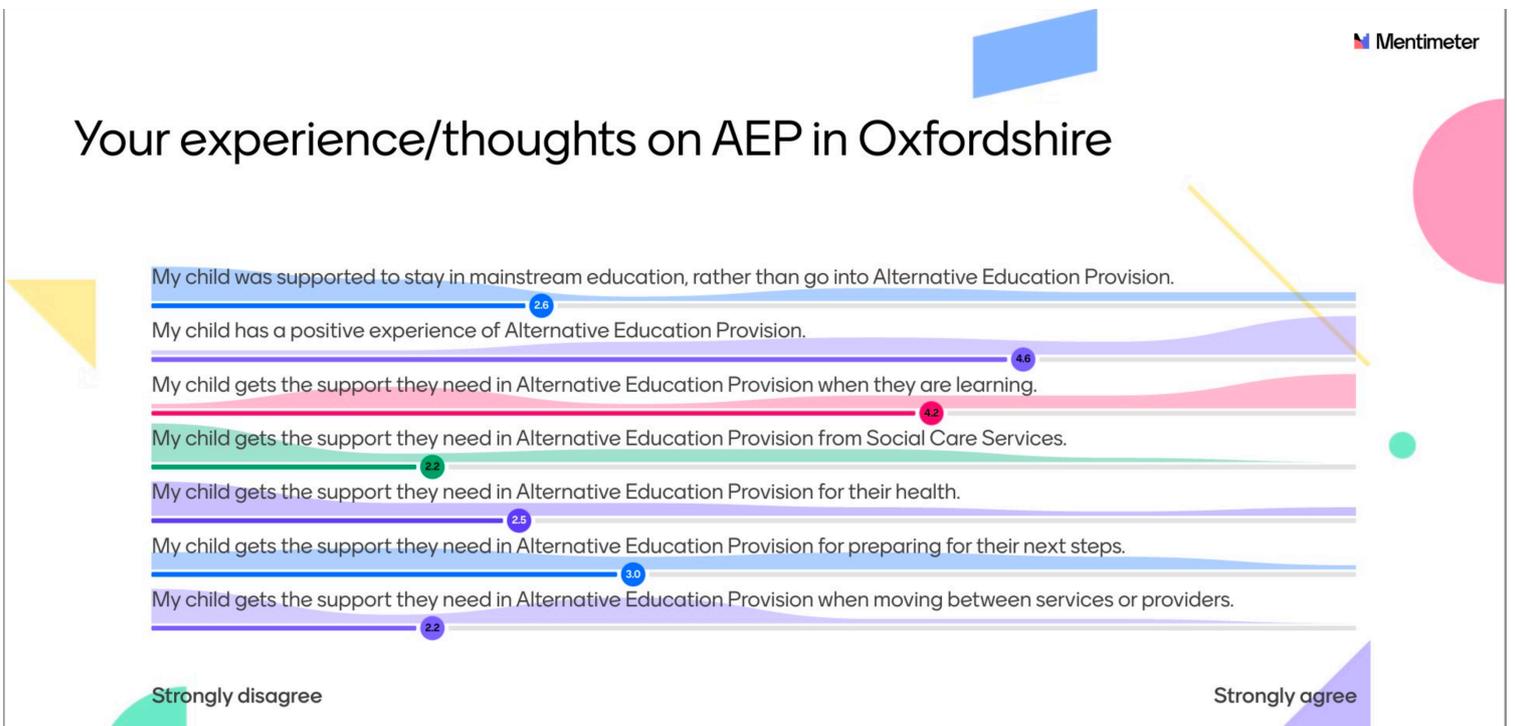
This was the first question that was asked, focusing on families' experiences of Alternative Education Provision (AEP) in Oxfordshire. Participants were invited to share how well they felt their children were supported in various areas:

- Remaining in mainstream education
- Support for learning, health, and social care within AEP
- Transition support between services or providers

Key Findings:

- Strongest agreement: Support for learning within AEP (average score: 4.6)
- Lowest scores: Support from Social Care Services and during transitions (average score: 2.2 each)

These scores indicate that while learning support in AEP is largely positive, there are significant concerns regarding transitions and social care support.

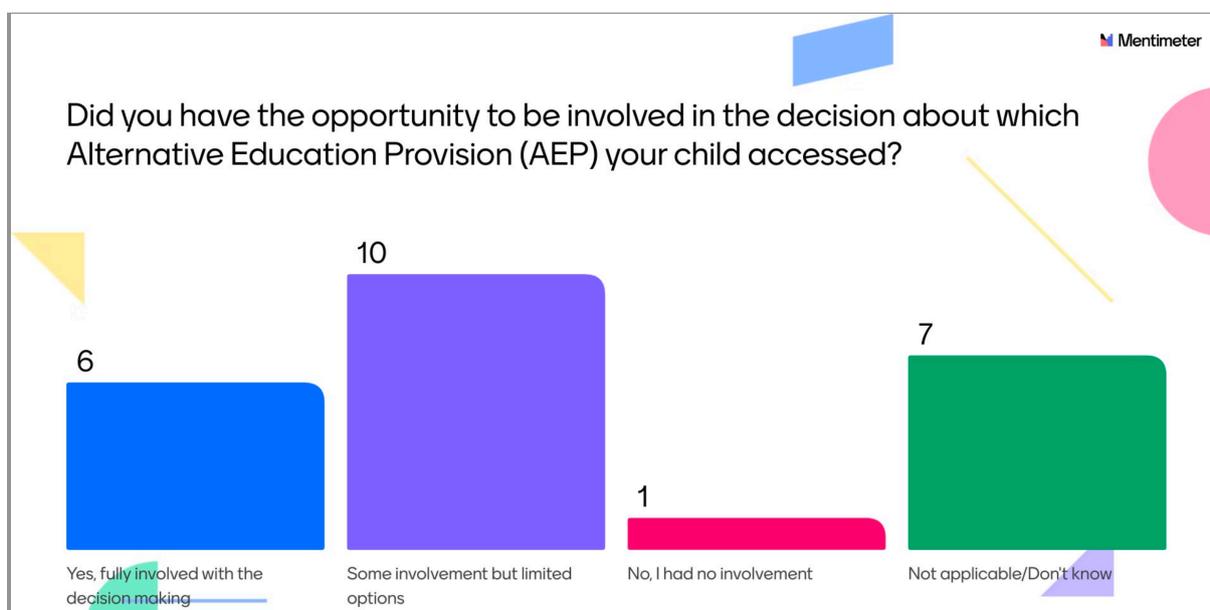
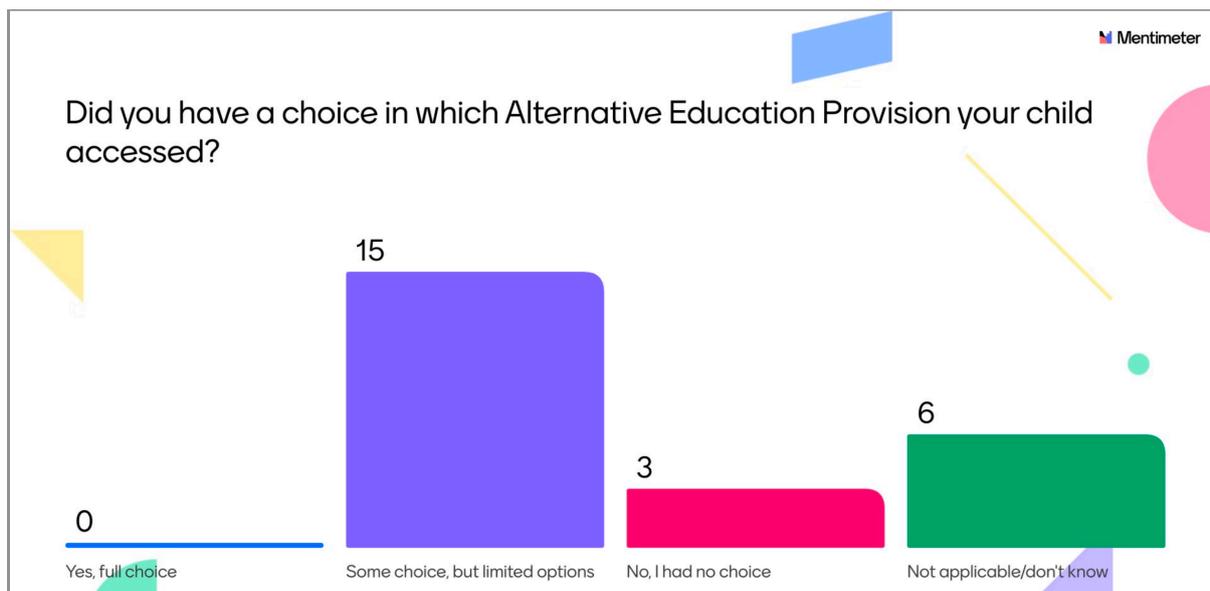


Choice and Involvement in Alternative Education Provision (AEP)

Families also reflected on the level of choice and involvement they had in the decision-making process regarding AEP.

- **Choice:** None of the respondents felt they had full choice over the AEP their child accessed. The majority (15) said they had some choice but limited options, while 3 said they had no choice at all. 6 participants indicated that this question was not applicable to them or they were unsure.
- **Involvement:** When asked whether they had the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process, responses were more varied. 6 said they were fully involved, and 10 said they had some involvement but limited options. 1 participant reported no involvement, and 7 answered not applicable/don't know.

These responses suggest that while some families are included in the process to some extent, many feel their choices are constrained, and full involvement is not the norm.



What's Working Well?

- A wide range of AEP options provides flexibility when children's needs change.
- Providers are described as kind, caring, and neurodivergent-friendly, creating safe, therapeutic spaces.
- Tutors have strong SEND understanding and a calm approach, enabling learning in low-stress environments.
- Children engage in art, animals, outdoor time, and other interest-led activities supporting confidence and healing.
- Small group tutoring, including sports-based environments, has helped re-engage learners.
- Oxfordshire Hospital School (OHS) provides tailored, responsive support, including home-based learning.
- Some schools supported AEP requests proactively and initiated provision while awaiting funding.
- Positive feedback on providers like Dare to Dream, Fleet Education, and Jessie's Art Shed.
- The Children's Integrated Team's support workers are described as outstanding.
- Adaptability in provision changes over time has benefited families.
- EOTAS routes have enabled families to tailor provision to children's needs.
- Schools and OCC have supported suitable provision once needs were acknowledged.
- Children can now learn in flexible environments where they are encouraged, not restricted.
- Relief and satisfaction reported when appropriate AEP is finally in place, even if delayed.

Even better if....

Information, Guidance & Transparency:

- Families need clear, accessible information about AEP options, including support for LD and SEMH.
- Greater transparency from OCC and schools on processes, entitlements, and funding.
- SENCOs should share AEP information proactively.
- Clearer understanding of tutor approval rules and funding processes needed.
- Regular meetings with providers and support teams to monitor progress.

Access, Choice & Flexibility:

- More provider choice required; long delays and restrictive tutor rules are barriers.
- Address unconscious bias—sporty APs are suitable for all genders.
- Flexibility in mainstream settings could reduce reliance on AEP.
- Broader, holistic definition of education is needed.

Timeliness & Proactive Support:

- Support often takes years to implement and is sometimes limited to a few hours per week.
- Delays in funding and poor LA responsiveness cause missed education.
- Early planning and quicker decisions can prevent crises.

Post-16 Provision & Future Planning:

- Families face uncertainty beyond Year 11; no clear post-16 AEP options.
- Provision must continue beyond 16, supporting Preparation for Adulthood (PfA).
- Equity in funding and access is essential.

Socialisation & Inclusion:

- Children often isolated; social opportunities promised but not delivered.
- Focus on social skills and peer interaction is needed.

Trust, Attitudes & Support:

- Families want their lived experience respected.
- Attitudinal change needed in schools and OCC.
- Families should not have to navigate complex systems alone.

Top 3 Priorities:

Families were asked to identify their top priorities for improving Alternative Education Provision (AEP) in Oxfordshire. The word cloud below captures 56 responses, with recurring themes clearly emerging around timeliness, communication, flexibility, and suitability.

These insights were echoed throughout the event and reflect a strong desire for more responsive, transparent, and tailored support for children and young people accessing AEP.

Timeliness:

- Delays at every stage create crises and lost learning.
- Early intervention and faster access to provision are critical.

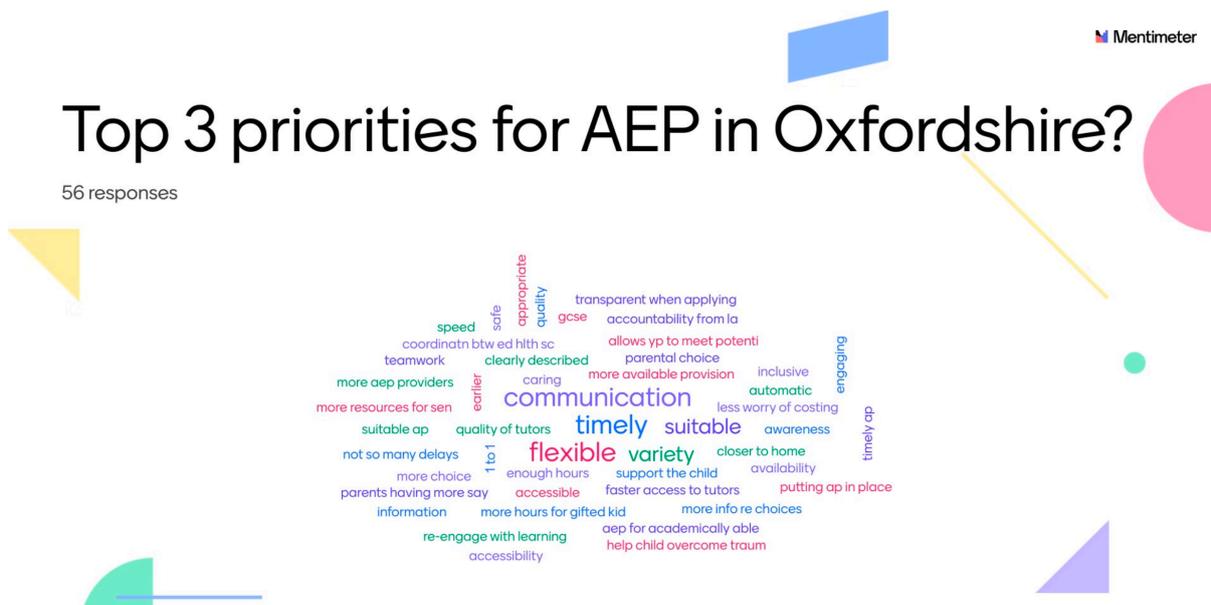
Communication & Transparency:

- Clear, proactive communication about options, processes, and funding is needed.

Flexibility & Suitability:

- Provision must be tailored to individual needs, with variety, accessibility, and genuine parental input.

This feedback highlights a collective call for systems and services that are more responsive, joined-up, and centred around the individual needs of children and their families.



Direct Quotes from Families

“It took nearly three years to get my daughter one day a week – and 14 months to get four shorter days. Too late, too slow.”

“I didn’t know what my options were—I had to do all the research myself.”

“We just need clear, honest information about what’s available and what we’re entitled to.”

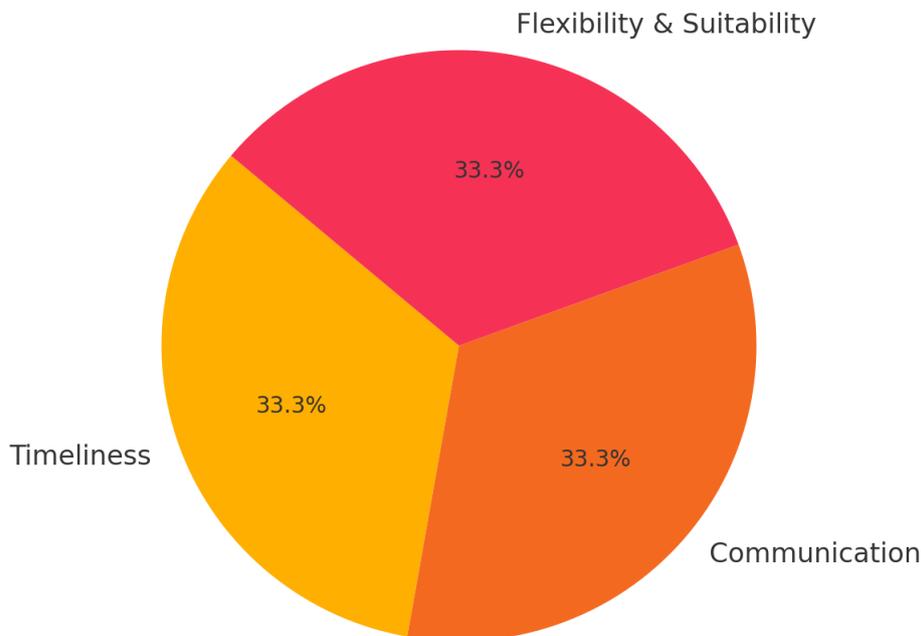
“The education system isn’t set up for our kids. It puts a ceiling on them when it should be helping them reach their potential.”

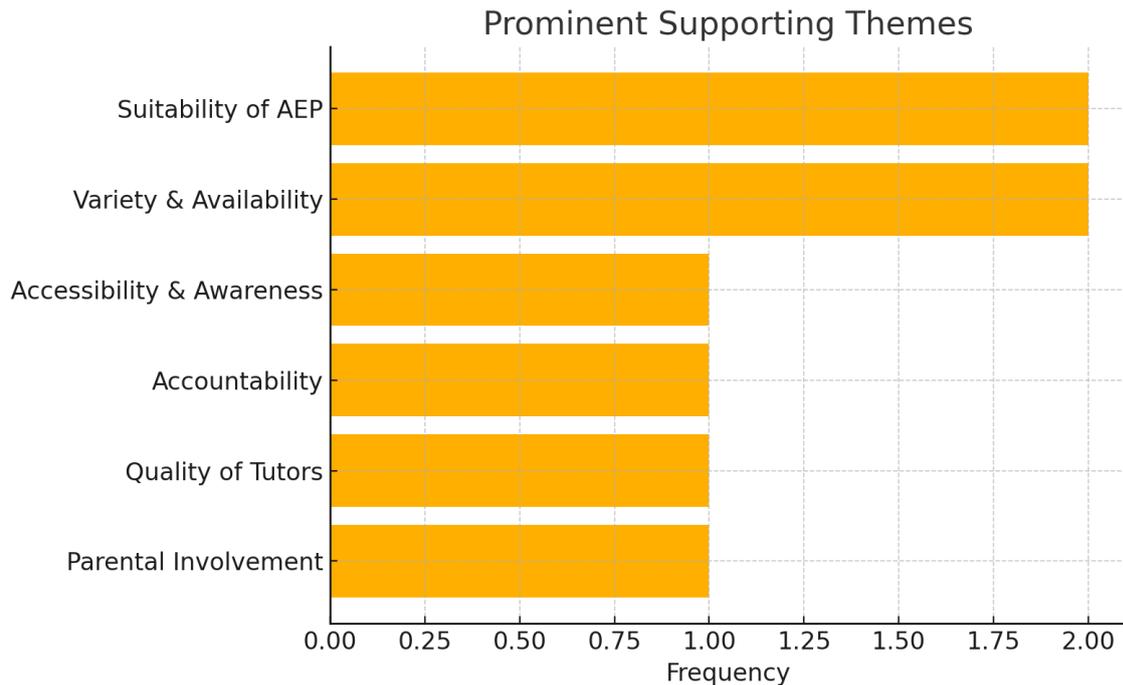
“After July, we’re looking into an abyss. What happens when there’s no Post-16 provision?”

“My son only sees his tutor and family members. He’s completely isolated, and even though he says he doesn’t mind, he has no friends and no social skills.”

Visual Summary of Priorities

Top Priorities from Listening Event





Breakout Discussions

Participants joined breakout discussions focusing on:

- Access to and Awareness of AEP Options – Identifying gaps in knowledge and support.
- Communication Between Families, Schools, and OCC – Exploring where communication is breaking down and how it can be improved.
- Timeliness and Process Transparency – Reviewing how delays and unclear processes impact families, and identifying practical solutions.
- Suitability and Flexibility of Provision – Ensuring AEP meets the diverse needs of children and young people, including academically able CYP with SEMH.

These sessions revealed that many families face challenges due to a lack of consistent, timely, and transparent information about AEP. Discussions centred on practical ways to ensure that families are supported with clear guidance, appropriate provision, and genuine partnership at every stage.

Reflections and Next Steps from Oxfordshire County Council

The Parent/Carer Forum Listening Event explored the key areas of Alternative Education Provision in Oxfordshire, with parents/carers and professionals engaging in meaningful discussions about what was working well and what could be even better.

The feedback was really useful, with parents/carers offering thoughtful and constructive suggestions from their lived experiences.

Their insights and priorities identified will play a valuable role in shaping the future development and improvement in AEP in Oxfordshire.

To support this development and improvement in provision we are creating a Working Group of professionals and Experts by Experience to ensure that AEP continues to grow as a dynamic and inclusive community providing the best possible support for our young people and their families.

If you are interested in being part of the working group, please register your interest by email info@oxpcf.org.uk