

Analysis of Alternative Education participants shows missed opportunity to support young people

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Recent work by the Social Wellbeing Agency shows we are missing a critical opportunity to support young people in Alternative Education.

“We were asked by the Education Review Office (ERO) to analyse data on young people who have participated in Alternative Education.

“Our work confirmed what Alternative Education providers and the young people would tell us – they have had difficult and traumatic lives. They often have high and complex education, health, and wellbeing needs, and have had a disrupted education.

“The most striking finding is the comparison of young people in Alternative Education to a group of similarly disadvantaged young people. The long-term outcomes for young people in Alternative Education across multiple measures are worse.

“We are missing opportunities to identify and address these needs much earlier in their lives. Not only that, it suggests Alternative Education is a critical opportunity to provide support to these highest needs young people towards the end of the teenage years,” says Aphra Green, Deputy Chief Executive, Policy, Data and Insights.

“The description of the lives and experiences of the young people in Alternative Education is very consistent with [our other work](#) on children and young people with very high needs. Most of these young people are in regular contact with various parts of government from an early age.

“This report provides additional insights to support [work](#) already underway across the social sector to respond to the needs of children and young people, across the education, health, and care and protection systems.

“Even a small improvement in Alternative Education could potentially result in additional young people achieving a high school qualification, more in employment, and fewer young people becoming involved in the criminal justice system (either as victims or perpetrators)”.

“The 23,000 young people we looked at are now aged between 18 and 33 years. They’ve missed out. But this analysis provides a compelling case for change so we can do better for those young people currently in Alternative Education, and those who will enrol in the future. We look forward to working alongside the Ministry of Education and other agencies on this,” says Ms Green.

Alternative Education is an initiative for students aged 13 to 16 who have become disengaged from or alienated by mainstream schools and its aims are to assist the young people to enrol in further education, training or to be employed. Around 2,000 students participate in it each year.

This analysis is part of a wider research and evaluation project led by the ERO to understand the quality of provision in Alternative Education and recommend improvements to how the education system supports young people’s outcomes. Read ERO’s [full report](#) and the [summary document](#) and the Social Wellbeing Agency’s [technical report](#).

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