ALMA EDUCATION

Admissions Policy

Approval date:	August 2026
Review date:	August 2027
Version:	1.0
Approved by:	 Melanie Steel, Director of Education
Approved by:	Maxine Wellsbury, Advisory Board

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Statement of Intent

Alma Education welcomes learners referred by schools and local authorities, and places are offered in an open, fair, clear and objective manner. Alma works to the principle that any commissioning body accessing Alma's referral arrangements will be able to understand easily how a placement is agreed, and will not be discouraged from referring a learner based on unclear or inconsistent criteria.

Alma Education is a non-school alternative provision. Learners are referred to Alma by their school or local authority (the commissioning body), which remains fully responsible for the learner's education and safeguarding at all times. Alma provides part-time, non-school provision alongside a learner's placement at their commissioning body, and never becomes the learner's registered school or takes on responsibility for their full-time education.

Legislation and Statutory Guidance
Equality Act 2010
Human Rights Act 1998
Education Act 1996
SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 Years (Jan 2015)
Arranging Alternative Provision: Guide for Local Authorities and Schools (Feb 2025)
Non-School AP Voluntary National Standards (Aug 2025)
UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018

1. Legal Framework and Related Policies

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance, including, but not limited to, the legislation and guidance listed in the table above.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following Alma policies:

- Behaviour Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- SEND Policy
- Data Protection and Privacy Policy
- Attendance and Absence Policy

Equality and diversity in referral and placement decisions are embedded across this policy, the Behaviour Policy and the Staff Code of Conduct.

2. Definitions

- The 'commissioning body' is the school or local authority that refers a learner to Alma and remains fully responsible for that learner's education, safeguarding and welfare throughout the placement.
- A 'placement' is the arrangement under which a learner attends Alma sessions, agreed between Alma and the commissioning body.
- 'Part-time provision' means Alma delivers an agreed number of sessions each week, alongside the learner's wider education arrangements with the commissioning body. Alma is never the learner's registered school and does not take responsibility for a learner's full-time education.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The commissioning body

The commissioning body is responsible for:

- Remaining fully responsible for the learner's education, safeguarding and welfare throughout the placement.
- Referring the learner to Alma with accurate and complete information, including any known safeguarding, medical, SEND or behavioural needs.
- Agreeing the terms of the placement with Alma, including the number of sessions, start date and any funding arrangements.
- Communicating any reasons for a placement not proceeding, and any right to raise a concern.
- Remaining the first point of contact for the learner's family regarding the learner's overall education.

The Advisory Board

The Advisory Board, in its advisory role, will:

- Seeking assurance that Alma's referral and placement arrangements are fair, consistent and compliant with the relevant legislation and guidance.
- Reviewing Alma's capacity for new placements periodically.
- Seeking assurance that equal opportunities are applied throughout the referral and placement process.

The Director of Education

The Director of Education is responsible for:

- Liaising with commissioning bodies regarding the referral and placement of learners.
- Determining Alma's capacity for new placements, taking account of staffing, session locations and the needs of learners already placed.

- Ensuring that Alma has all the information it needs from the commissioning body to make a placement decision.
- Making arrangements for a new placement to start as soon as reasonably possible once agreed.
- Publishing a link to this policy on Alma's website.
- Notifying the commissioning body of the outcome of a referral.

4. Referral and Placement Arrangements

Alma accepts referrals from schools and local authorities only. Alma does not accept direct applications from parents or carers; a parent or carer wishing to explore Alma's provision for their child is directed to speak with their child's school or local authority in the first instance.

Alma's provision is part-time and complements the learner's placement with the commissioning body, which remains responsible for arranging the learner's full-time education. Alma's role and its limits are made clear to the commissioning body and the learner's family before a placement begins.

Alma will accept referrals from a wide range of commissioning bodies, and will not discriminate against any learner based on a protected characteristic.

Confirm responsibility before a placement begins

The commissioning body's written confirmation that it remains responsible for the learner's education, safeguarding and welfare must be in place before a placement is agreed. Do not begin sessions without it.

5. Capacity

The number of placements Alma can offer at any time is determined by Alma's staffing, the availability of learning mentors and Alma hub space, and the needs of learners already placed with Alma.

Where Alma is unable to accept a referral due to capacity, the Director of Education will communicate this to the commissioning body promptly, along with an indication of when capacity may become available.

Where the admission of an additional learner would place a strain on Alma's ability to deliver a safe and effective service to learners already placed, the Director of Education will discuss this with the referring commissioning body.

6. Equal Opportunities

Alma's referral and placement arrangements are reasonable, clear, objective and procedurally fair, and compliant with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation. This means that Alma's arrangements will not unfairly disadvantage, whether directly or indirectly, any learner based on a protected characteristic or economic disadvantage.

Alma will not establish referral or placement criteria that exclude individuals with a particular protected characteristic, or that exclude a greater proportion of learners with a particular protected characteristic, unless Alma can justify how this is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Alma's placement criteria will not discriminate against disabled applicants, unless Alma can justify how this is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. Where necessary, Alma will make reasonable adjustments for disabled learners, parents or carers, for example during a home visit or initial meeting.

All learners who have named Alma in their Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan will be admitted, subject to Alma's capacity to meet the needs set out in the plan being confirmed with the commissioning body. Learners with SEND who do not have an EHC plan will be treated equally to all other referrals in the placement process, including learners who may need extra support or reasonable adjustments. Details of Alma's SEND provision can be found in the SEND Policy.

7. The Referral and Placement Process

The commissioning body will provide Alma with a referral, which will include:

- The learner's name and date of birth
- The learner's address and the commissioning body's contact details
- The reason for the referral and the outcomes sought
- Relevant information about the learner's needs, including any known safeguarding, medical, SEND or behavioural information
- Confirmation that the commissioning body will remain responsible for the learner's education, safeguarding and welfare throughout the placement

Alma may request supplementary information from the commissioning body where necessary to assess whether the referral is suitable and whether Alma has the capacity to meet the learner's needs.

Alma may assess its ability to meet a learner's needs by:

- Inviting the learner and, where appropriate, their family to an introductory meeting.
- Speaking with the commissioning body about the learner's current education provision and needs.

- Where appropriate, an initial visit to the learner's usual setting or an informal meeting with the learner.

A placement will only proceed once Alma and the commissioning body have agreed the terms of the placement, including the number of sessions, the start date, and any funding arrangements.

Where Alma is unable to accept a referral, the Director of Education will communicate the reason to the commissioning body clearly and promptly.

Check capacity and needs match before agreeing a placement
Do not agree a placement until the Director of Education has confirmed Alma has the capacity and expertise to meet the learner's needs safely. If in doubt, ask the commissioning body for more information first.

8. Starting at Alma

Alma will make arrangements for a learner to start as soon as reasonably possible once a placement has been agreed.

Before a placement begins, Alma will confirm with the commissioning body and the learner's family the session days and times, session location, and any individual arrangements needed to support the learner, including any risk assessment required under the Health and Safety Policy.

The Director of Education will inform the commissioning body once the placement has started.

9. Waiting Lists

Where Alma does not have capacity to accept a referral immediately, the commissioning body may ask for the learner to be added to a waiting list.

Alma will review its waiting list regularly. Where capacity becomes available, Alma will contact commissioning bodies on the waiting list in the order the referrals were received, taking into account the urgency of each learner's circumstances where this has been communicated.

A commissioning body may withdraw a referral from the waiting list at any time by contacting the Director of Education.

10. Declining or Ending a Placement

Alma may decline a referral, or end a placement, where Alma does not have the capacity or expertise to meet a learner's needs safely and effectively, or where continuing the placement would place unacceptable risk on the learner, other learners, or staff.

Any decision to decline a referral or end a placement will be communicated to the commissioning body clearly, promptly and in writing, with the reasons explained.

Because the commissioning body retains full legal responsibility for the learner throughout, decisions about a learner's wider education arrangements, including what happens if a placement with Alma ends, remain with the commissioning body. Alma works closely with the commissioning body to plan any transition and to minimise disruption to the learner.

11. Complaints and Appeals

Where a commissioning body or a learner's family has a concern about a referral or placement decision, this is raised with the Director of Education in the first instance, in line with the Complaints Policy.

Where a concern cannot be resolved informally, the commissioning body or family may raise a formal complaint under the Complaints Policy, which sets out the full process and timescales.

Because the commissioning body retains responsibility for the learner's education, any statutory right of appeal relating to the learner's overall school placement, for example an appeal against a school's decision, sits with the commissioning body and is not part of Alma's referral process.

12. Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Director of Education and the Advisory Board, or sooner if required by changes in legislation or statutory guidance. Any necessary amendments will be communicated to all staff. This policy was approved by Melanie Steel, Director of Education, in August 2026 and is due for review in August 2027.