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Dr R Dolton
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Dr Dolton

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: alternative provision

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 September 2010 to look at your school's use of alternative provision.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on examining the use of alternative provision for students who are vulnerable to underachieving, and the impact this has on the outcomes for these students.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

This letter briefly summarises our discussion at the end of the visit.

Outcomes

- All students who attend alternative provision gain appropriate results in the core curriculum alongside qualifications, such as BTEC and Key Skills for Employment. They are also able to gain academic GCSEs alongside vocational courses. This is due to the school's imaginative curriculum that enables courses to be tailored to the needs of individual students.
- The flexibility enables students to change from vocational to academic courses and keeps progression open. For example, a student who completed the Hairdressing Young Apprenticeship is now taking A-levels in the sixth form.
- Students in the first Key Stage 4 cohort to gain vocational accreditation, in 2010, all exceeded their challenging targets. These students echo the views of those currently attending work placements when they say that the provision enabled them to learn important skills, such as taking responsibility for their work and how to work effectively with others. It also raised their aspirations.

- Most of the students went on to further education colleges or remained in the school's sixth form. A few took up apprenticeships or employment. There were no students who were not in education, employment or training.
- The school's monitoring shows good improvements in the students' attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning since they embarked on the work placements. One student, who is now in the sixth form, commented, 'Last year I never dreamed of staying on at school'. She feels her work placement has given her a sense of self-belief, stating, 'You feel you can achieve'. She stated that this encouraged her to focus on her work in school.

Selecting and commissioning

- Establishing contacts in such a rural area as that served by the school is not easy. With the support of Connexions Services, however, the school has established a wide range of suitable placements.
- The school's alternative education coordinator ensures work placements are matched well to the students' needs and that all safeguarding checks are carried out appropriately. The school values local placements, stating that the benefits include the fact that the students can continue studying the core skills in school and that the placements frequently lead to offers of employment.

Monitoring, evaluation and support

- The school has effective systems for monitoring and evaluating students' progress, attendance and behaviour while they are on alternative provision. As a result, some provision has been discontinued or adapted to ensure it meets students' needs fully.
- Students are involved in self-assessment and members of staff in their work placements contribute to this.
- Students say the guidance that they, and their parents, receive on selecting suitable courses is good. They are able to choose their work placements and feel the employers are well informed about their specific needs.
- The students value the fact that teachers provide study support lessons at school. They say the study support enables them to keep up to date with any lessons missed due to work placements.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop alternative provision in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector