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Mr P Bunn
Principal
Castle Community College
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Dear Mr Bunn

13 survey inspection programme: schools' use of alternative provision

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 October 2012 to look at the school's use of alternative provision.

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.

Strengths of this aspect of the school's work

- The school gives alternative off-site provision a high priority and this is reflected in the seniority of the team who lead and manage this area of the school's work. The seniority of the team means that a wide range of information is shared and decisions made quickly to ensure success.
- Off-site provision is small scale because the school's aim is to meet the needs and interests of as many students as possible in-house. The provision is an integral component of the curriculum which offers vocational courses to all students. This means that the group who go off site, although all boys at the moment, are a mixed ability group which helps the providers to create a positive working environment in which different skills and talents are valued. It also means that timetables are balanced and students do not miss important lessons while they are off-site. Additional, intensive support is provided in school where necessary to ensure that students succeed.

- The school chooses carefully from a limited number of providers, all of whom are recommended by the Local Authority and subject to detailed service level agreements with the school.
- There is good use of introductory days, taster events and interviews so that students and their families are well informed and feel very well supported by the school and the providers.
- Senior leaders use very careful tracking and information about students' abilities, attendance, behaviour, social skills and interests in order to provide appropriate alternative curriculum opportunities and ensure that they make good progress.
- The high priority given to the care, welfare and achievement of young people is reflected in the strong and effective partnerships and good communication between school and provider. There is meticulous sharing of information before and during placements both formally and informally. Off-site providers and the school hold each other in high mutual regard.
- All off-site provision leads to accreditation and has the potential to lead onto further higher level courses. All of last year's students completed their courses, successfully gaining accreditation. They also achieved qualifications in English, mathematics and science. Almost all have continued their education and/or training.
- Students are very positive about their off-site days. They grow in confidence and maturity as well as gaining skills and accreditation. They appreciate the different atmosphere in the off-site providers saying they are treated as adults and are learning about working life which is preparing them well for their futures.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- discovering more about the impact of the provision by evaluating and comparing the achievement, attendance and onward employment or training activities of this group and the rest of the cohort
- seeking ways to widen opportunities for boys and girls by counteracting the gender stereotyping currently prevalent in the provision.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector