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Mrs R Hughes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hughes

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 24 and 25 January 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the senior head of house who coordinates alternative provision and the deputy headteacher who line manages the school's pastoral provision. I also met with a group of students and some individual students at their placements. I examined a range of documents. I also visited the following providers that your students attend:

- The LearnFit Academy Birmingham
- Birmingham Behaviour Support Services, The Link Centre
- The Blue River Academy
- The Lighthouse Group (TLG)

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 selects and commissions purposeful alternative provision and off-site placements to manage and improve the attitudes, attendance and achievement of the few students whose behaviour presents concerns.
- The school's highly detailed systems for tracking and monitoring students' attitudes and behaviour allow it to intervene early and to prevent

problems from escalating. The well-understood 'consequences ladder' ensures that most behaviour issues are dealt with internally. Exceptionally, students may be moved temporarily to other schools in the close knit local 'collegiate' network, or to full-time or part-time placements in providers drawn from a small local pool.

- There is a high degree of consultation with parents and the student before an alternative placement is chosen. The school often responds to parents' requests in commissioning specific forms of placement.
- Providers are selected on the basis of recommendations from the local authority and partnership of high quality placements. Some that are inspected have been rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- The school gives providers detailed records of the backgrounds of the students. Progress reports from most providers are regular and detailed. Students who receive three week courses at The Link Centre have follow-up reviews four to six weeks after their placement to ensure that behaviour targets in school are being met.
- The head of house who coordinates the school's provision has very strong working relationships with most providers. He readily responds to their concerns and makes regular visits. All providers are visited before placements to check their suitability.
- The school has a strong focus on ensuring that students achieve appropriate qualifications, both through their time in school and through their alternative provider. Alongside or as part of their vocational courses most students achieve literacy and numeracy skills qualifications and/or mathematics and English GCSEs.
- For all of the students who have received alternative provision in recent years, this has made a strong contribution to successfully retaining them in education, employment or training.
- Students' views of the support they have received are highly positive. They note that the provision has been selected to offer support and environments that are well-suited to their needs. Students who attended short-term courses at the Link Centre note how the provision has helped reform their behaviour by making them more reflective. Others note how more one-to-one working with staff or collaborative working in small groups has reengaged them in the process of education.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the commissioning of providers is always supported by comprehensive service-level agreements which set out what the school expects and establishes consistency in practice, for example in reporting on students' progress

- ensuring that the school systematically and regularly scrutinises health and safety audits and quality assurance reports on providers
- establishing systematic formal and regular reviews of provision, for example to keep the number of learning hours that students spend with providers under review.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector