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Mr R Kennedy
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kennedy

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 18 and 19 February 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with senior school staff and representatives of the Secondary Behaviour Support Service (SBSS), and examined a range of documents. I also visited the school's off-site allotment used by students following an alternative curriculum, and two of the providers that your students attend, Pedestrian and In-training, where I talked to 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.

Strengths of this aspect of the school's work

- Alternative provision is very well coordinated through strong partnerships between the school, the local authority's Secondary Behaviour Support Service and local providers. This is underpinned by effective collaboration between schools in the city and a wide range of multi-agency work, both of which support students at risk of exclusion.
- A small and declining number of students access alternative provision off-site. Intensive pastoral and academic support, focused on including students fully within the school, is a contributory factor. Provision in school includes an alternative curriculum unit which promotes positive attitudes through experiential learning, some of which is off-site. For example, a local allotment is used productively as a context for learning.

- Effective commissioning of off-site provision that adds value to school-based work is achieved by regular and rigorous liaison and service level agreements between the local authority and providers. These processes ensure that high expectations are clear and safeguarding requirements are met. Quality assurance includes observations of teaching off-site. During the visits to providers, tutors' enthusiasm for professional development was evident in the examples of teaching resources and approaches that were shared.
- Communication between school staff, students, parents and carers, support services and providers is a strength. The pupil support procedure provides a clear structure for involvement and intervention by different stakeholders. The school's 'inclusion passport' and SBSS's 'personal learning plan' are examples of information flow that help to match provision to students' individual needs, should off-site provision prove appropriate. Reviews of students' continuing progress off-site are regular and provide a clear record of their personal and academic development. Computer-based attendance registers promote swift communication and follow-up should any issues arise.
- All off-site provision is accredited. In addition to vocational qualifications students continue with their English and mathematics GCSE courses either at the school or one of the local authority's specialist learning centres where students starting off-site provision spend the first six weeks. Students experience a mix of two off-site providers each week, linked to their interests and career aspirations.
- Students accessing off-site alternative provision value the opportunity to use specialist resources and work independently or in small groups with the support of an expert practitioner. All seven students that followed a programme in 2011-12 continued their education or training post-16. School records indicate that alternative provision students contribute to the school's improved attendance, decline in exclusions and rising achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing regular feedback to governors about the progress of students accessing off-site alternative provision.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector