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Mr P Roach
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Dear Mr Roach

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 5 and 6 March 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the pastoral manager, the pastoral coordinator, the business manager, the director of standards and the head of upper school. I spoke with a number of students and examined a range of documentation. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: Training for Today; Bolton Wise; and several placements arranged by Alternative Curriculum Services.

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 places the needs and achievement of individual students at the heart of its selection and commissioning of alternative provision. The school regularly works with three providers but does not limit opportunities to the placements and training they offer. Other providers are identified when required to meet students' interests and aspirations.
- The school ensures that all providers meet requirements for the safeguarding, health and safety of students. In the case of work

placements, they are very well served by a brokerage service which carries out rigorous checks on the school's behalf. Visits to providers and placements confirm an alertness to the importance of the various elements of safeguarding.

- The school and providers invest considerable time and effort in ensuring that provision matches students' interests and abilities. Information, interviews and taster sessions over a period of time help students to make considered choices. Training and placements are selected which align with students' academic abilities. The success of all students in the 2012 cohort in gaining a qualification and moving on to training or employment indicates that this process works very well. It is clear that, for the majority, the qualifications they gained through their placements provided a suitable foundation for their next step towards adult life.
- The school's approach to sharing information about students with training providers and employers is judicious. Most, although not all, providers and employers are content with the amount and type of information they receive about students' abilities and aptitudes at the start of a placement. Some suggested that it was important to allow students to begin with a clean slate and to take responsibility for their conduct and the impression they create.
- There are clear lines of communication between providers and the school. Providers are confident of a rapid response from the school should an issue arise. They value greatly being able to communicate consistently with the same member of staff, who holds operational responsibility for the alternative curriculum programme.
- Every student following an alternative curriculum has a bespoke timetable. Common to all are GCSE courses in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Students have some one-to-one sessions with teachers of English and mathematics to help them make sufficient progress. Like other students, they may attend timetabled intervention groups if they are falling behind. Similarly, they may be mentored by a member of staff if they need additional support to, for instance, meet deadlines.
- The school makes efforts to ensure that students following an alternative curriculum are able to participate in the wider life of the school. For instance, transport is provided so that students can play in sports teams.
- The impact of success on the alternative curriculum programme is evident in students' improved behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning. It is also clear in their improved achievement, which is tracked discretely.

- In 2012 all students following an alternative curriculum gained at least five GCSE passes, including English and mathematics. The school's robust predictions for this year indicate that an above average proportion of the cohort are expected to gain at least five GCSE passes at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. It is anticipated that 75% of the group will make the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11. This is well above the national average and close to the performance of the year group as a whole.
- The school receives daily reports from providers about students' attendance. They also receive regular reports about their progress in developing work skills and in gaining their qualifications. Students contribute to the evaluations of their progress and those spoken to say they find this helpful in understanding how to improve.
- Almost all students spoken to were upbeat about the opportunities the alternative curriculum provides for them to gain some experience and skills related to the world of work. Where the match between the aspirations of individual students and their placements was very close, students were very positive and evidently enjoying their placements and training. For some, placements had shown them options that they did not know existed. All could recognise the positive impact these opportunities are having on their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- checking that providers receive the information they require about students' levels of literacy and numeracy so that no time is wasted at the start of each training programme.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector