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Mr A Gilhooley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gilhooley

Ofsted 2013 14 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 with Marilyn Mottram HMI on 2 May 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with a number of leaders involved in coordinating alternative provision and had the opportunity to talk to some of the Year 11 students who follow courses off-site. I also visited the Aspire Centre that your students attend.

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

- School leaders carefully select students who would most benefit from attending courses off-site. Each student follows a course that interests them, is suitable for their level of ability and offers good potential for progression to further study or employment.
- Leaders go the extra mile to make sure that the needs of individual students are met, sometimes making additional arrangements for students to attend courses in other local areas.
- All courses lead to worthwhile accreditation with a 100% success rate in recent years. Every student involved in alternative provision also achieves GCSEs in English and mathematics with almost all of them reaching their target grades. Many of the students involved in alternative provision

progress to study the specialist areas of engineering, agriculture or hairdressing when they leave school.

- The school's timetabling arrangements mean that students who access offsite provision experience a full and balanced curriculum. Currently, only one student misses any lessons as a result of following her course. This student is very well supported by teachers to make sure that she does not fall behind in mathematics and science.
- The Aspire Centre is the main provider used by the school and there is a long-established relationship. Good communication between the centre and school leaders results in students feeling, and being, well supported. For example, when the course tutor raised concerns about one student struggling with mathematical aspects of the engineering course, the student quickly received extra help at school from a specialist teacher.
- Providers receive good quality information about any special educational needs students may have. However, students' strengths and development needs in English and mathematics are not communicated in enough detail.
- The school's vocational coordinator makes regular visits to the Aspire Centre to check on the quality of the course and how well pupils are making progress. Currently, the small number of other providers used are not visited by someone from school, although staff from the local college that organises the placements do make checks. Good reporting arrangements are in place with all the providers. As a result, school leaders and parents are regularly informed about how well the students are making progress.
- Students are very positive about their experience. They appreciate the employability skills that they are developing. One student explained why he thought his course was worthwhile: 'It's what I want to do with my life'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making sure that providers are given detailed information about students' strengths and weaknesses in English and mathematics
- making regular visits to off-site placements for students following land-based and hairdressing courses which match the quality of those to the Aspire Centre.

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector