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Mr E Wilkes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilkes

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 on 4 and 5 June 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with senior school staff, teaching and support staff, groups of students in Year 9, 10 and 11, and the Prince's Trust Coordinator. I evaluated a range of documents. I also visited a sample of off-site providers that your students attend: Red House Stables, Changes Hairdressers, Blue Lagoon Aquatics and St Joseph's Primary School.

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 the feedback provided at the end of the visit.

Strengths of this aspect of the school's work

- Discussions with students, the school's tracking data and case studies indicate that students who participate in alternative provision in school and off-site improve their attitudes to learning. This is because the context for learning is linked to career interests. All Year 11 students currently taking part in the alternative curriculum have secured places on post-16 college courses.
- There is a clear emphasis on developing skills that will be valued in the workplace. These range from teamwork and problem-solving promoted in-school through the Prince's Trust 'xl' programme to independence and initiative developed with the support of off-site providers. Students gain in confidence through opportunities to work with adults who have specific expertise and they develop in-depth knowledge themselves.

- Teaching and support staff involved in different aspects of alternative provision share a strong commitment to inclusion. Relationships between staff and students are clearly a strength. Visits to a sample of providers indicate that students' engagement remains a high priority off-site. There are suitable procedures in place to ensure that students' attendance, punctuality and progress off-site is monitored regularly.
- The variety of alternative curriculum approaches used reflect the range of behavioural, social, emotional or learning needs of the students involved. Whatever the programme, the school promotes the importance of accredited achievement. This includes English and mathematics qualifications, at GCSE if possible. The best examples show that students apply the skills developed in their school studies, off-site.
- Alternative off-site provision is part of the whole school strategy to involve all students in work-related learning. This gives importance to vocational experience and emphasises the value of workplace skills. Some school-based activities balance well with the off-site provision, for example the school vegetable garden or the 'xl' projects that are focused on community needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- giving students and off-site providers more specific targets which are related to students' needs and are evaluated through the visits by school staff to off-site providers
- making sure that the school's safeguarding policies and procedures are shared with off-site providers and the implementation is checked routinely as part of the school's monitoring
- working with off-site providers to ensure that their distinctive contribution to alternative provision is given prominence, for example by increasing students' understanding of entrepreneurialism
- mentoring students at the earliest opportunity when alternative provision is considered, so that any off-site elements are as closely matched to students' needs as possible, right from the start.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector