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Mr P Hewitt
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hewitt

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 25 and 26 June 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During my visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher who coordinates the provision and several other staff including pastoral support staff, a key worker and curriculum guidance staff. In addition, I met with three students who attend alternative provision, and examined a range of documents, including case studies and monitoring and evaluation records. I also met staff from the providers below, which your students attend off-site:

- Bolton College
- ACC.

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 staff responsible for alternative provision articulate a strong commitment to ensuring that some of the school's most vulnerable and/or challenging students have access to suitable alternative provision that will enable them to move onto further education, employment or training when they leave the school. These students are often disengaged from learning and have complex needs because of their circumstances. The

school sees these as students who are in danger of becoming lost to the education system through exclusion or their refusal to attend.

- The school has researched, selected and commissioned the services of a range of providers independently of the local authority. The key criterion was how well they met students' varying needs, interests and aspirations.
- The quality of the accommodation in the college visited was first rate.
- Liaison between the school and provider before the students' placement is effective. Providers receive information about students' academic, social and emotional development, and other data that will help them better understand and meet the specific needs of the student. Any issues, for example concerning attendance are brought to the school's attention.
- Students complete individual learning plans before a placement is chosen and their parents and carers are suitably involved in the process.
- Providers must satisfy rigorous due diligence checks before they are accepted by the school. This includes quality assurance checks of their practice, and procedures for safeguarding and health and safety. The deputy headteacher visits most providers twice a year to evaluate their on-going suitability and check the quality and standards of provision.
- All students attending alternative provision also study mathematics, information communication technology, English and science to ensure they develop these key skills. In 2012 38% of students gained five A*-C at GCSE, including English and mathematics.
- Students also gained City and Guilds, BTEC and ASDAN qualifications in a range of work-based learning courses like construction, catering, beauty therapy and motor vehicle maintenance at level 1-2. This enabled almost all of them to enter education, employment or training when they left school. Some students are sent to specific providers to boost their self-esteem and develop their social and emotional maturity, which they do.
- Students are assigned key workers and pastoral support staff who monitor their academic progress, attendance and general well-being.
- School data and feedback from providers show that these provisions are having a good impact on improving some of these students' attitudes to learning and attendance. It also helps them to develop independence and resilience. This had led to major falls in levels of incidents and exclusions.
- Providers complete regular reviews of students' performance against target areas such as attendance, behaviour and academic progress.
- Students were very positive about their experiences and the benefits of alternative provision, such as the relevance of the placements which are often linked closely to their interests and career aspirations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all external providers have the same high expectations as the school for students' attendance, behaviour and teaching through more regular and formal monitoring of their procedures and protocols
- further narrowing the achievement gap that exists between this group and all students' academic outcomes by the end of Key Stage 4
- making sure that all students who access alternative provision have more breadth and balance in their curriculum, such as the more aesthetic and creative subjects, which are strengths of the school
- guaranteeing that every placement leads to a recognised and appropriate form of accreditation and/or qualification for students where possible
- giving students at all providers the chance to reflect upon, discuss and evaluate their on-going experiences of alternative provision, as a tool for refining provision, by increasing the frequency of on-site visits by staff
- reporting to governors the academic outcomes for this group of students.

Yours sincerely

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector