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Mr M Fenton
Headteacher
Cedars - Newcastle, Moorlands and Darwin Bases
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Dear Mr Fenton

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 23 and 24 September 2013 to look at the pupil referral unit's use of alternative provision. During my visit I met with you, your senior mentor and other members of staff. I observed the weekly meeting that you hold to discuss individual students. I examined a range of documentation. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: Martec Training, E.Quality Training Limited and Unity 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 our discussion at the end of the visit.

Strengths of this aspect of the pupil referral's work

- The majority of Key Stage 4 students who are registered at Cedars are placed at an alternative provider full time or part time to study for vocational qualifications. Cedars offers additional sessions so students can study for GCSEs, particularly in English, mathematics and art. The pupil referral unit also provides a base for students to attend meetings and receive support from outside agencies, as appropriate.
- Before they join the pupil referral unit, students frequently have had negative or disrupted educational experiences and their previous

attendance has been sporadic. Attendance by students when placed at an alternative provider by Cedars increases significantly.

- Mentoring staff quickly establish very good relationships with students and keep in very close contact. They are very responsive to students' needs and so issues are very quickly resolved. A weekly meeting of all mentoring staff and the bursar of the pupil referral unit means that attendance and engagement are very closely monitored and rapid action is taken if necessary. This flexible and caring support from adults is a key factor in students' success.
- The allocation of a mentor to each of the providers means that a named member of Cedars' staff develops a close working relationship with the provider as well as the students who attend that provider. This ensures that there is an effective partnership in supporting the student to succeed.
- As there is good knowledge of the providers and close working with students there is a good match of students to suitable courses and therefore a strong likelihood of success. Students study a wide range of relevant vocational qualifications. They improve their English and mathematics so that they achieve GCSEs or functional skills qualifications. The large majority of students go on to further study.
- The pupil referral unit works with a small number of Ofsted-registered alternative providers. This means that leaders and managers can be assured that quality is checked by an external body and standards monitored in safeguarding and health and safety.
- A comprehensive service level agreement is in place with each provider detailing respective responsibilities. The head of centre carries out regular quality assurance visits to monitor the service level agreement and keep in touch.
- Students spoken to say that they enjoy their placements. They describe a future for them that builds on their current learning. Students consistently feel that the staff from Cedars or the provider will support them and resolve any issues they encounter.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the senior management team of Cedars are systematically checking that students are making good or better progress on their courses and are on a trajectory towards attending full time relevant and appropriate education as quickly as possible

- ensuring that the centre's records of pupil and provider contact reflects the work carried out and is systematically completed to ensure that there are no omissions in procedures or information sharing
- ensuring that the senior leaders, including the management committee, collate available information frequently and regularly evaluate students' achievement and the effectiveness of providers.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector