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Mr M Irons
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Dear Mr Irons

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 1 and 2 October 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the assistant headteacher in charge of alternative provision, and leaders with responsibilities for inclusion and the curriculum. I spoke with representatives of two employers who offer extended work placements to some students. I met with groups of students, and examined a range of documents and students' files. I also visited the following providers that your students attend:

- Rowdeford School – a specialist school for communication and interaction
- The Springfields Academy – a specialist sports college and vocational training centre
- Wiltshire College Trowbridge campus.

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

- Alternative provision is commissioned from a small number of well-known providers from a list approved by the local authority. The providers visited on this inspection offer placements of a very high quality. The standard of

accommodation and resources in many courses is exceptionally high. The effectiveness of two of the three providers visited has been evaluated as outstanding by Ofsted, and provision for 14 to 16 year olds was judged to be good in the third.

- The quality of extended work placements for students is checked thoroughly by regular visits from school staff and detailed health, safety and quality checks by an education-business partnership agency.
- Provision is very well tailored to suit the individual needs of each student, and is adjusted flexibly, through discussion with students and their families, to meet students' changing needs as they move through the school. As a consequence, many students speak very favourably of the impact of this provision on their confidence, behaviour, and personal development.
- In particular, students say they value the opportunity to work in small groups, with more individual attention from specialist staff, on useful vocational and life skills.
- Providers value the detailed information provided by the school on each student, which enables them to shape programmes which meet students' needs and are pitched appropriately to give students the right level of support and challenge. Students are well-prepared before joining their placements through prior visits and discussions about procedures and expectations.
- Communications between the school and providers are effective, enabling school staff and coordinators to respond swiftly if providers raise concerns. Providers keep careful track of students' progress against course aims as well as their personal and employability skills, although this is not as rigorous on the work experience placements.
- The school gives a high priority to retaining students in education, and allocates considerable resources to alternative programmes. The governing body has established specific oversight of this aspect of the school's work through its student welfare committee.
- Students acquire useful vocational and key skills accreditation as part of their programmes. Nearly all students move onto further education or training places when they leave school, often in vocational areas experienced as part of their alternative provision.
- All students follow either GCSE programmes in English and mathematics or functional skills programmes in literacy and numeracy at levels which reflect their capability. However, not all make good progress in English and mathematics. Many students miss English and mathematics lessons when out on their placements and do not systematically receive high quality catch-up programmes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students make good progress in English and mathematics by systematically providing high quality support to help them when catch up work they have missed when they are out on their placements
- tracking and monitoring the academic progress and attendance of students following alternative provision as a group, to ensure that the provision represents good value for money
- sharpening the reporting of the effectiveness of work experience placements by tracking the development of students' employability skills.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector