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12 November 2013

Mr D Peaple
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Peaple

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 22 and 23 October 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you and leaders responsible for aspects of the alternative curriculum. These included the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher in charge of Key Stage 4, the careers co-ordinator, the special educational needs coordinator, the foundation learning coordinator, and the student support centre manager.

I visited a number of lessons and activities involving students who were following aspects of alternative provision and the foundation learning programme. This included a visit to an angling activity led by school staff and a coach from the national Fishing for Schools programme. I met with a representative of the West Berkshire Education-Business Partnership which administers Vodafone's 'Take A Chance' programme; this provides mentoring and personal development programmes for six of your 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 or have attended:

- Longridge Outdoor Learning Centre, Marlow
- The Willows Primary School, Greenham
- Hartwood Oak Buildings, East Woodhay

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 and staff know their students well, and are very alert to the changing needs of students most vulnerable to disaffection, underachievement and disengagement. Up-to-date information on students' attitudes, aspirations and behaviours is shared in detail in regular meetings of the school's pastoral teams.
- Students appreciate the flexible approaches taken by the school in shaping a curriculum around their personal interests, aspirations and needs. Such approaches have led to striking individual successes, for example in developing interests and skills in horticulture and landscape work through combinations of school projects and work placements.
- Alternative provision feeds flexibly into the students' curriculum and supplements their academic and vocational courses. All students take GCSEs in English and mathematics and nearly all pass, although the grades they achieve reflect some weaknesses in progress in English.
- Apart from the few students who have extended work placements for up to one day per week, alternative provision is made either at intervals or in condensed blocks of time. As a result, most students do not regularly miss lessons in other subjects. Where they do, they have catch-up programmes managed by the school's Student Support Centre. This support is much valued by students, but there is scope for tracking in more detail the impact of the support on their academic progress, especially in English and mathematics.
- The school's foundation learning programme ensures that most students who use alternative provision leave school with useful vocational qualifications, most often at Level 2, from a range of subjects including construction, sport, information technology, travel and tourism, and finance.
- Almost all students in the small cohorts identified for alternative provision go on to further education, employment or training.
- Aspects of alternative provision which focus on boosting students' motivation, maturity and readiness for work are highly successful developing students' employability skills and engagement in learning. For example, the impact of the 'Take A Chance' scheme is closely monitored and shows considerable gains in students' academic success and personal development.
- Providers visited offer students well-resourced experiences to develop their skills and interests. Work placements are arranged through providers on a list approved and maintained by the West Berkshire Education-

Business Partnership to ensure that safety standards are met and that students are clear about the providers' expectations in the workplace.

- Providers feel that they receive appropriate information from the school about the characteristics and needs of the students who work with them. There is, however, insufficient contact between school staff and work placement providers to discuss each student's progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- significantly strengthening the monitoring arrangements of extended work experience placements, to include clearer aims and goals for individuals, and much more regular contact with employers to review students' performance and progress
- ensuring that the school has copies of records of safety checks carried out on alternative placements by other agencies on its behalf
- ensuring that students' academic progress and personal development is tracked with equal rigour in all aspects of alternative provision, and that students' achievements are fully recorded, reported, and where possible, accredited
- presenting governors with analyses of academic outcomes for students on alternative provision in terms of their progress as well as their attainment, and noting how many achieved, exceeded or fell short of expectations
- developing the leadership of alternative provision to secure greater coherence in programme aims and methods of monitoring, evaluation and review.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector