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Mr G Lloyd
Principal
The Holly Hall Academy
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Dear Mr Lloyd

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 5 and 6 February 2014 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision.

During the visit I met with you and a number of your senior colleagues who have responsibility for alternative provision. I met with 12 students and examined a range of documents. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: Black Country Wheels, Nova Training and The Cherry Tree Learning Centre.

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

- You know your students well and have considered alternative placements thoughtfully with due regard to both students' and parents' and carers' wishes. A small number of local placements have been carefully selected which provide a suitable range of vocational options for a relatively small group of students, including those with acute medical needs, those in need of re-engagement or to improve students' motivation for learning. You are responsive to feedback from students; there are instances where placements have been changed when students indicate that things are not working out as hoped.

- Good attention is paid to meet individual needs and circumstances and secure alternative provision with the potential to provide continuing pathways post-16. The outcomes of this are impressive; for example, of those students engaged in alternative provision last year, all have progressed into further training or employment related to their placements.
- Importantly, off-site providers are selected because they offer a suitable range of vocational accreditations. Of last year's cohort of students, all achieved at least one vocational qualification and a significant number obtained several qualifications.
- The academy wisely places considerable emphasis on the importance of students securing the highest possible grades in GCSE English and mathematics. By placing alternative provision in an option block, which, for the vast majority of students results in one day per week spent out of school, this allows them to continue their studies in the core subjects during the remainder of the week. This also ensures that a balanced curriculum is retained. Students themselves understand the importance of continuing to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in terms of their future employability.
- On last year's programme, two students gained a GCSE grade C in mathematics and all gained a Grade D to G in English and mathematics, together with a range of Level 1 vocational qualifications. For most of these students, this represented good progress, given their starting points and the considerable barriers to learning that many of them faced. Current students are making similar progress.
- The alternative provision settings are housed in suitable accommodation with good facilities and all provide a positive learning environment for your students. Effective learning was evident in the three settings visited. Safeguarding is given suitably high priority and attention. You support students well; for example, completing travel training with students on alternative provision to encourage confidence in travelling to their placements. The achievement and progress of students is carefully tracked and reported upon by both the alternative providers and yourselves. Your tracking of progress indicates considerable success in re-engaging a number of young people who were at risk of alienation from education and/or exclusion from the academy.
- The academy evaluates a range of evidence to judge the impact of alternative provision on students' personal and social development; for example, attendance, participation in lessons, behaviour logs, rewards and sanctions received by students, feedback from staff and students themselves and comments received from parent and carers. Overall, your records indicate that this type of intervention makes a significantly positive impact on many students' personal and social skills.
- Students are generally highly positive about their placements and can identify the range of skills and aptitudes that they are developing. In particular, they comment favourably on the vocational qualifications they are gaining and the potential impact on their future employability.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- recording the outcomes of the various monitoring activities undertaken more formally and increasing the monitoring of and support provided for any students in full time alternative provision
- ensuring that all placements receive a full written profile of each student's abilities, needs, aptitude and behaviour prior to the placement commencing
- ensuring that all providers are provided with written information about the academy's child protection and safeguarding policies and making sure that the governing body take account of off-site provision when reviewing the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

Yours sincerely

Judith Matharu
Additional Inspector