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Dear Dr O'Hagan

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 12 and 13 February 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, a deputy headteacher, an assistant headteacher and the member of staff who leads on alternative provision. I also met students and held discussions with and/or visited the following providers that your students attend: Kickstart; Groundwork; Teens and Toddlers.

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

- In the main, the school uses providers with whom it has long-standing relationships, at times commissioning new or revised courses from them as well as responding to new offers they make. However, staff are alert and responsive to opportunities which arise, such as those funded by the government related to local needs. Regular checks are carried out on providers' health and safety and safeguarding systems and the local authority's online risk-assessment tool is used prior to beginning any new off-site activities.
- The school has a clear rationale for its use of alternative provision. In almost all cases this is to meet the behavioural, social and emotional

needs of students. A number of models are used including some short-term provision, run in school by external providers and aimed at ensuring that students are more motivated and better prepared for education, training or employment post-16. Some provision is a mix of work placement and mentoring, with long-term impact measures.

- A small number of students follow accredited vocational courses at local colleges or alternative provision, often where this also helps to meet some of their personal development needs. However, extending vocational opportunities is not the school's main purpose for selecting alternative provision.
- Providers appreciate the strong links they have with the school. Initially, providers receive a useful summary of reasons for a student's placement which they generally augment, for instance through testing. Learning mentors accompany students to all sessions at the majority of providers so communication with the school is direct.
- Alternative provision is not incorporated into students' timetables. Much is of short duration, half-a-day or less, and runs over a confined period such as 10 weeks. Students are expected to catch up on the work missed and the well-established, daily after-school sessions provide good opportunities to do this. Staff who have responsibility for alternative provision ensure that students receive help to keep up with their work: arrangements made are tailored to their needs. These may involve additional in-class support from a teaching assistant or learning mentor or, at Key Stage 4, a reduction in the number of GCSE courses followed.
- All students follow GCSE courses in English, mathematics and science in school and are also expected to gain a qualification in information and communications technology. In 2013, all 10 students on alternative provision gained a GCSE in English, with one achieving grade C. Nine of the 10 gained a GCSE in mathematics with four reaching at least a grade C. One student gained at least five GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, at grade C or above. Of the 10 students, five did not make expected progress from their starting points at the end of Key Stage 2. However, two students achieved the grades expected of them in English and mathematics, based on their starting points. Another two did so in English but not in mathematics, while one did so in mathematics but not English.
- Three of the 16 current Year 11 students attending alternative provision are on track to make expected progress. Two are expected to gain five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics, while several more are on track to gain passes in either English or mathematics.
- Where alternative provision leads to accreditation, this is usually at Level 1 and below the level of other courses students are following. Generally, however, the accreditation provides a basis for progression post-16. In 2013, all the Year 11 alternative provision students moved on to

education, employment or training. There was a direct link between the alternative provision followed and the post-16 choices made by seven of the 10 students.

- In addition to session-by-session reports from learning mentors, staff visit alternative provision at intervals. Although they do not monitor the quality of teaching, they use the regular reports along with feedback from students to work with providers to make improvements where required. However, the use of summative evaluations of the overall impact of alternative provision is weaker.
- Senior staff monitor the impact of alternative provision through frequent checks on students' performance including their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning. While this is effective in evaluating the impact of longer-term alternative provision, it is less convincing where activities are of short duration.
- Students spoken to were positive about the opportunities alternative provision gives them. They said it helped motivate them to work harder in school and increased their self-awareness. For some, it has highlighted a post-16 pathway: for others, it is providing a vocational qualification on which to build. Those observed at various provisions were fully engaged in activities. They were well-behaved, attentive, and followed the directions given by staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- evaluating the overall impact of alternative provision, and particularly of one-off or short-term activities, on improving students' behaviour and attitudes to learning to ensure that this is targeted to best effect and delivers good value for money.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector