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Mr N Walker
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Walker

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 school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the assistant headteacher with responsibility for inclusion, the coordinator for supporting vulnerable students, the special needs coordinator, the connexions officer attached to the school and the head of Year 11. I also met students and visited motor vehicle maintenance at Northumbria Youth Action and hairdressing at Barnado's in Palmersville, two of the providers that your students attend.

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

- The school is highly inclusive and uses alternative provision as part of a very carefully planned provision which meets the needs of students well. All students have a 'learning passport' which identifies how well they are achieving and their future intentions for employment, training or further education. The connexions officer attached to the school oversees these so that all students receive both good internal and independent advice and support.

- You have worked with the local authority, Sunderland local authority and the Sunderland NHS Trust, to provide meaningful work experience for Year 12 students with a disability or learning difficulties. This experience is then planned to be enhanced through an internship followed by meaningful employment or an apprenticeship. This has been successful in giving students ambition to and a realisation that they can gain meaningful employment despite their difficulties.
- Last year you identified a group of students who had very poor attendance levels. You worked well to get them re-engaged with school. For some of these students you recognised that they were often away from school because they were acting as carers for younger siblings. You successfully ran an accredited course with Barnado's which focused upon students acting as 'babysitters'. Attendance of this group improved considerably with all gaining suitable qualifications, including English and mathematics, before they left to go on to training or further training when 16.
- Presently there are four students who are supported at an off-site provider. Two of these attend the off-site provision for five days each week and two for one day a week. You ensure that all students have appropriate support for the development of their key skills. For example the two who attend one day each week have additional lessons and support from the vulnerable student's coordinator so they can catch up on any work they miss; consequently they are progressing well in their GCSE subjects. The two who attend full time have improved greatly their attendance so they are now able to receive focused work to improve their mathematical and English skills.
- Students enjoy their placements and find the areas they are covering relevant for their future career aspirations. As one said 'looking forward to Friday helps me tolerate the rest of the week and makes sure I behave and work'. They also learn relevant aspects of health education, both based around identifying risks but also health risks from using industry strength detergents or oils and how these can cause skin problems.
- You work closely with the local authority both in identifying appropriate providers and ensuring all aspects of health and safety are covered. This includes ensuring providers know about the school's child protection procedures. Your staff have delivered a presentation to other local schools and providers on what the school expects from placements and how providers can better support schools.
- Providers feel very well supported by the school and appreciate the frequent visits from staff to see how well students are working as well as checking facilities and how students are being taught. Providers all contact the school immediately if a student is absent, although attendance has improved for all students since attending their placement.
- Providers give termly feedback to the school on how well students are progressing both with their vocational area and behaviour and attitudes.

Some of the feedback is more useful than others, particularly when it identifies how students are progressing socially and work related attitudes, for example working as part of a team or taking responsibility for leading an activity.

- You give providers relevant information about students, including if they have a learning difficulty. However, although providers understand the learning difficulty they do not always have the expertise to support students, for example how a students may be supported with their reading when they complete on-line tests.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- when working with providers used across the local authority, devise a consistent approach to how providers can report on students' key and employability skills in a consistent way
- working with providers by giving advice on how they can best support students who have learning difficulties.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector