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Mrs B Pierpoint
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Dear Mrs Pierpoint

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 11 and 12 February 2013 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the academy leader for student support and the assistant principal for achievement, and held a telephone discussion with the parent of a student. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- Midpoint and The Orchard Centre pupil referral units, which are federated and now share the Lawnswood Campus
- The Timken Vocational Training Centre
- Making Learning Work, an agency for work placements and vocational education
- Re-Entry, the Low Hill site.

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 academy's alternative provision successfully retains in education a number of young people whose academic progress and personal well-being are highly vulnerable, often for behavioural, social and emotional

reasons. Alternative provision makes a significant contribution to the success of the academy's policy of not permanently excluding students.

- Placements are commissioned from a list of approved providers on the local authority's area prospectus. The local authority's multi-agency support team (MAST) plays a prominent role in assuring the quality and safety of the placements, and in working with the academy to ensure that placements are suitably matched to the personal and academic needs of each student.
- Many, though not all, of the placements offer high quality classrooms, workplaces and counselling facilities in provision that has been judged as good or better by Ofsted. The safety and well-being of students is paramount across all of the provision. Comprehensive assessments of the risks associated with a student's engagement in specific activities are undertaken. The academy works with providers to ensure that students feel safe in the settings by having nominated key workers or points of contact, and that they wear the right protective clothing where necessary.
- Providers receive full details of students' specific academic and personal needs which enable them to shape training and support programmes accordingly. The academy does not systematically give providers copies of its own child protection procedures, but the providers ensure that staff are aware of correct procedures to be followed. Work placements are organised through an agency whose clear child protection policies ensure that employers are aware of their responsibilities in this regard.
- Providers appreciate the quality of information they receive from the academy, and the involvement of academy staff in periodic reviews of students' personal development. There are, however, too few visits which focus on the quality of teaching and students' academic and vocational progress. Providers feel that students would appreciate more visits by academy staff to show an interest in their work and progress.
- The large majority of students attend alternative provision full-time, until in some cases they are reintegrated into school. Most providers offer a balanced curriculum in English, mathematics and other options alongside vocational and life skills programmes. In a few cases where placements are of three days per week, the academy makes arrangements for English and mathematics support on an individual basis, sometimes in one-to-one or small group sessions in the academy.
- Academy data and information from providers indicates that students' attainment and progress in English, mathematics and other options is improved this year. For students on alternative provision in Year 11 at the end of 2013, attainment and progress was poor in GCSE and functional skills examinations in English and mathematics. It was slightly better for some in their vocational programmes. During the current academic year, providers have introduced much sharper systems to track students' academic progress as well as their personal development. Some of these

systems have only very recently been introduced. The academy's own systems currently do not allow leaders to readily identify whether or not students on alternative provision are making good progress against realistic but challenging targets, and thereby to determine whether programmes need to be improved or altered.

- Providers maintain helpful records of students' progress in a range of personal and employability skills, such as attendance, punctuality, attitudes to work and cooperation with others, which are shared with the academy, students and their parents or carers. One provider makes particularly good use of short-term personal targets as a means of helping students get quickly back on track. Students are given very good information, advice and guidance on post-16 career options and pathways. Nearly all move into employment, education or training, making progress onto courses at an appropriately higher level.
- Students have positive views about their experiences on alternative provision. They particularly value the calmer atmosphere associated with the smaller groups in which they work, and many praise the quality of the individual support they receive from staff and mentors. Some were observed making a great deal of progress because they much enjoyed developing craft skills in an area of vocational interest, such as woodworking or decorating in construction.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the achievement of students on alternative provision, especially in English and mathematics
- setting clear targets within the academy for the achievement and personal development of individual students on alternative provision, against which the success of the programmes can be evaluated
- ensuring that governors hold leaders fully to account for spending on alternative provision, by obtaining regular and incisive evaluations of its impact on students' achievements, attendance, behaviour and attitudes
- making regular visits to providers focused on the quality of teaching and student's progress, as well as on students' well-being.

My concerns about the registration status of one of the providers you are using have been reported to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector