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Mr C Davis
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Davis

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 March 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you and two of your senior colleagues with responsibility for alternative provision. I met with 3 students and examined a range of documents. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: EDS Seeds Centre and Landau.

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

- A very small number of students are currently involved in alternative provision. Alternative provision is used to re-engage those who are seriously alienated from mainstream education in an attempt to improve these students' attitudes to learning and retain their involvement in education. It is apparent from your records that without such provision, the young people concerned are at serious risk of permanent exclusion from school. Case studies indicate that for these young people, alternative provision is being successful in re-engaging them and providing them with continuing education. This is useful in developing a range of work-related skills to improve their options post-16.

- Use is made of a local authority list of approved providers to identify potential partners to work with the school. Placements are providing a range of safe, varied and suitable experiences for students.
- A sensible emphasis is maintained on continuing with literacy and numeracy learning at an appropriate level, recognising the importance of these qualifications post-16. Despite this, your records indicate that in recent years, students attending alternative provision have made less than expected progress in both English and mathematics at GCSE. There is evidence to support your view that the social and personal difficulties faced by the young people concerned proved insurmountable barriers for the school to overcome.
- You demonstrate a flexible approach to finding placements that best meet individual needs, interests and aptitudes. There is a clear willingness to secure another placement if one fails and a genuine reluctance to give up on students.
- Students are positive about the benefits of alternative provision. Those interviewed were honest about the difficulties they had experienced in mainstream provision and appreciated the opportunities to try something different. One student indicated that he felt lucky that the school had not given up trying to help him, despite his challenging behaviour. His comments indicated that his experiences in his alternative placements are beginning to have a positive impact on his attitude to learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all providers receive detailed information on students prior to the placement commencing
- increasing the monitoring of placements to ensure the school has an accurate, up-to-date view of the quality of provision
- ensuring all providers are provided with consistent information regarding the school's expectations of safeguarding with more routine, regular checks completed by the school
- ensuring that students are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes in their English and mathematics qualifications.

Yours sincerely

Judith Matharu
Additional Inspector