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Mr W Carr  
Headteacher  
Ralph Thoresby School  
Holtdale Approach  
Leeds  
West Yorkshire  
LS16 7RX

Dear Mr Carr

### **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 March 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, two deputy headteachers and the off-site learning manager. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: The White Rose School of Beauty, Educ8 and Leeds City College Technology Campus.

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 currently use alternative provision for a small number of your students. You only use provision that is listed as suitable by Leeds City Council. The Council's procedures for assessing the quality of alternative provision are rigorous and thorough. They include detailed checks on the suitability and safety of the premises, the quality of the educational provision and the arrangements for ensuring that students are safeguarded and that adults are appropriately trained. The suitability of alternative providers is reviewed annually and the schools that use alternative provision take part in the annual reviews alongside local authority personnel.
- Because you only use a small number of providers, your off-site learning manager has been able to build positive working relationships with the

staff who work with your students. Providers said that they valued the regular contact they have with both the off-site learning manager and heads of year. Providers feel that they have the support they need from your school.

- Most of the students attend alternative provision for only one day a week. The placements are carefully selected to match the students' needs and aspirations and are usually vocational options including beauty techniques, construction and motor vehicle maintenance. A small number of students attend provision that supports them in continuing with their academic studies and in building their personal and social skills. For the majority of students, their placements are part of a planned progression towards further study at college, an apprenticeship or a job. When students return to school, they are given time and support from teachers to complete any coursework they may have missed, particularly in English and mathematics. Students said that they know that if they began to fall behind in their school work, they risk losing their placement.
- Providers said that they are given sufficient written information about students' particular needs, including child protection information where relevant, and their prior attainment. This is supplemented by discussions with school staff and information that the students provide themselves on their application forms. Taster sessions, sometimes attended by parents, help ensure a smooth transition.
- All of the students are studying courses that are accredited at a level that matches their potential. For example, those studying beauty techniques will attain a qualification that is equivalent to four GCSE passes at grade C or above. Most of the students are also studying English and mathematics at GCSE; mainly at school, but a small number do so at one of the alternative providers. One student has already gained a GCSE grade C in mathematics and is continuing to study the subject to try to improve the grade before applying for sixth form.
- Of the ten students from Year 11 who attended alternative provision last year, nine achieved a GCSE pass in both English and mathematics. The remaining student achieved entry level qualifications. All but one went on to further study or an apprenticeship. Most of these students made at least the progress that is expected of them from their starting points in Year 7, but there were three who did not, because of their particular circumstances. There is a similar picture for this year's cohort of eleven students; most are on track to make the progress they should by the end of Year 11. The school's records also show that attending alternative provision has a positive impact on students' attendance.
- The providers give feedback on the progress the students are making three times a year for Year 10 and five times for Year 11, in line with your in-school 'data grabs'. They also feed back on behaviour and attitudes to learning via the 'collaborative learning manager' (CLM) which is an on-line system that allows swift exchanges of information between providers and your school. All of the providers visited were meticulous in making sure that absence and lateness were recorded on CLM straight away, so that any unexplained absences could be checked and followed up immediately

by the team in school. The system also makes links between students' progress at placement and their progress at school, allowing both to be recorded and tracked. There is also frequent email contact between providers and your school.

- The effectiveness of provision is reviewed annually, and is carried out at the same time as the review of health, safety and premises issues. It is carried out by the local authority in conjunction with members of staff from the schools that use the provision. You do not carry out any separate visits to evaluate the quality of the provision, but your off-site learning manager makes informal visits and observes the students and the staff who work with them. The impact of the alternative provision on outcomes for individual students is evaluated. You keep an extensive file of case studies and other information.
- Students themselves spoke positively about their experiences at college. They all understood that this was part of their progress towards further study and a job. All expressed a wish to continue with their vocational options after the age of 16.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- considering ways of supporting providers with the areas for development that are identified at their annual review; for example, by sharing expertise in marking and feedback, or your school's expectations for how work will be presented
- pulling together the key points from your evaluations into a brief summary of the impact of alternative provision on the outcomes for students and its cost-effectiveness. This would be a useful document for governors, as well as informing your whole-school self-evaluation.

Yours sincerely

**Linda McGill**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**