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Mr R Leighton
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Dear Mr Leighton

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 18 and 19 March 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the senior vice principal and the flexi-learning lead. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Barking and Dagenham College, Redbridge College, Lambourne End, Superior Education and PIP Training and Services.

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

- Alternative provision at Sydney Russell is an integral part of the curriculum for some students in Year 11. It is a valued aspect of the school's provision to ensure that all students have enjoyable and productive experiences in Key Stage 4 leading to good accreditation and a clear pathway to further study and a career.
- Each year the school arranges a variety of courses and opportunities to meet students' particular needs. This means that individual students have the chance to build upon an existing skill or interest, sample something new or take steps to a future career.

- Students work closely with staff to choose the areas that they would like to follow. Providers, school staff and students all agree that students being able to choose means that they are more likely to be engaged and be successful.
- There are very close links with the local authority's flexi-learning team. This team has developed, with schools and providers, efficient systems of commissioning, monitoring and quality assurance. Procedures to monitor attendance, safeguarding, health and safety and the quality of teaching are robust. Providers welcome the rigour of this work and feel that it adds to the quality of what they offer.
- Even though students spend three days each week at other providers the school is very clear that they retain responsibility for students' progress and welfare. Students themselves say that they still feel that they belong at Sydney Russell and are well supported and any issues will be sorted.
- All providers visited track students' achievement very rigorously. All courses are accredited and students' progress toward accreditation is closely mapped and reported back to school. Providers are very flexible and use their on-going assessment and knowledge of the students to ensure that there continues to be a good match between the course and the student. They offer more challenge or support when appropriate.
- The majority of pupils make at least expected progress and achieve a minimum of five GCSEs including English and mathematics. Through the alternative provision they make good progress and gain a range of Level 1 and Level 2 courses which prepare them very well for the future. The vast majority of students remain in employment, education and training and build successfully on the qualifications they achieve.
- School staff and providers are proud of the very good progress individual students make in their personal and social development during their time at the alternative provision. The taught courses offer opportunities for students to develop aspects such as confidence and team work. Through attending alternative provision students become more responsible and are supported to learn in different environments with 'adult-like' expectations. These experiences prepare them well for transition to future employment or training.
- There is a very clear, shared commitment by the school and all providers visited to do the very best for all the students that they work with. They aim to understand the individual's particular strengths and areas of difficulty. They are highly ambitious for the students to succeed. This aspect of the school's work benefits from the leadership of a passionate coordinator. She brings energy and commitment and works very effectively to 'champion' for these students.

- Students are extremely positive about their time in Year 11. They feel that they are doing things they want to do and these are preparing them for the future.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- bringing together the rich qualitative and quantitative data and information you already hold to ensure that school leaders and governors have up-to-date knowledge of quality of alternative provision and its outcomes so that they can offer greater challenge and support
- building upon the work of providers to capture more systematically students' personal and social development to assure yourselves that individual students are always making good or better progress in these areas.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector