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Mr T Long
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Dear Mr Long

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 6 and 7 May 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, the assistant headteacher responsible for Key Stage 4, the manager of and a member of staff from the Personal Development Centre, a member of the local authority's 14-19 team, former students and a parent. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Cornerstone Vocational Training; Fullagar Construction Skills Centre; Instant Training.

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 has a strong focus on inclusion and uses alternative provision for a small number of students with the aim of keeping them engaged in education. Where this is successful, and it would meet the needs of individuals, the school tries to reintegrate students into full-time schooling. This strategy has been successful in a number of cases in recent years.
- The school is rigorous in selecting and checking the suitability of alternative providers. A number of providers used were approved by the local authority at a time when it coordinated this area of work; others

have a good track record in the region. The local authority left a helpful legacy with regard to alternative provision, ensuring that school staff were trained and qualified to carry out the range of checks required before placing students on off-site training courses. Relevant documentation to support checks and quality assurance are available to schools on the local authority's website.

- Alternative provision is selected to meet students' personal development needs. The school's strong engagement with parents means that they are closely involved in decisions about a placement and remain in close touch with the school and providers as a placement progresses. In the main the school seeks to meet students' academic needs itself, providing additional learning and pastoral support through its Personal Development Centre.
- The school ensures that providers receive the information they require before students start their courses. Where relevant, safeguarding information and details of students' special educational needs are included. However, the school has not shared its safeguarding policies with providers.
- Communication between providers and the school is very good. Providers are confident of a swift response if they contact students' key workers. Systems are clear with regard to reporting any safeguarding concerns, attendance and punctuality.
- The experience of alternative provision helps students grow in confidence and maturity as they rise to the expectations of a working environment where good timekeeping is essential, health and safety requirements have to be met, and staff and fellow students must be treated with respect.
- Alternative provision is planned as one or more of a student's options at Key Stage 4. Where possible, the day selected for alternative provision is one on which they miss the least number of lessons in English and mathematics. The Personal Development Centre staff efficiently coordinate the collection of work that students have missed and support them very effectively in catching up.
- Students are clear that the Centre is pivotal to their success because the help and nurture provided by staff is carefully tailored to their individual needs. They are both supported and challenged to complete their GCSE courses as well the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness. The latter helps students consolidate what they have learned through alternative provision, including a range of skills needed for working life.
- The school ensures that students attending alternative provision can gain qualifications in English and mathematics at an appropriate level, sometimes using entries at several levels to secure this. The targets set for students reflect the nationally expected rate of progress.

- Last year all students who had accessed alternative provision for a period progressed to education, training or employment. The positive experience of alternative provision was key to considerable improvements in their engagement and consequently their progress. Current Year 11 students are all moving on to college, apprenticeships or employment. They are building directly on the experiences and qualifications gained through alternative provision.
- Key workers make regular visits to providers to discuss and monitor the progress of students, both in their vocational courses and personal development. Some parents take up the invitation to attend these meetings. A number of providers, although not all, complete regular written reports on students' activities and progress. However, students' progress at alternative provision is not included in the school's termly reports to parents. The school evaluates the longer term impact of alternative provision through measuring students' achievement as well as their attendance, positive and negative behaviour points, and any exclusions.
- Both present and former students are very positive about the impact of alternative provision, and the support of the Personal Development Centre, on their academic achievement and their employability skills. They value the opportunity to learn through practical activities and in a work-place environment. This has given them a sense of direction as well as ambition for life after school. It has also improved their motivation to succeed in gaining academic qualifications because the value of these in the occupation of their choice is much clearer.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- adding performance in alternative provision to the regular reports to parents on students' achievements
- sharing the school's safeguarding policies with the alternative providers.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector