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Mr K Reynolds
Principal
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Dear Mr Reynolds

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 May 2014 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, two vice principals, the assistant principal who has oversight of alternative provision and the coordinator of provision for students who have special educational needs. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: New College Durham, YMCA, Windlestone School and the Green School.

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 use alternative provision for a small number of students. Some follow vocational courses for one day a week at college as part of their option choices in Key Stage 4. These students do not miss any lessons while they are at college as the timetable is adjusted for them. Some students who may be at risk of permanent exclusion or who are vulnerable in other ways attend other providers on a full-time basis.
- You select alternative providers from the list that is compiled by the local authority. The local authority has checked that all of the listed providers meet minimum standards for safeguarding and health and safety, but has

not carried out checks on the quality of the educational provision. Most of the providers are subject to external scrutiny, because they are registered provision and inspected by bodies such as Ofsted, or are part of health provision. However, not all the providers you use are subject to external inspection. We discussed the need to adapt your approach to quality assurance in view of this.

- You give thought as to where vulnerable students should be placed in order to meet their particular needs. Some attend alternative provision for a short period and then may return to mainstream, remain where they are or be found a more suitable placement. Others attend alternative provision for the rest of their time in Key Stage 4. Appropriate consideration is given to meeting students' academic needs as well as supporting their personal development. Targets for students' attainment and progress are discussed with providers before placement.
- All providers observed operate in accommodation that is safe and fit for purpose. Resources, such as for information and communication technology, were generally good.
- Providers typically have their own policies for child protection that are in line with the local authority's guidelines. All understood clearly their roles and responsibilities and what to do should an incident occur. You give providers detailed information about the range of students' needs before they are placed. Parents are involved fully in the process and their approval is always sought before final decisions are made.
- Providers said that they had positive working relationships with staff at Consett Academy. They particularly valued the links that they have with the education welfare officer regarding attendance, and with your special educational needs coordinator and vice principal. They welcomed the swift response to any phone calls and the frequency of contact regarding individual students.
- All of the students who attend alternative provision full-time follow courses in English, mathematics and science at an appropriate level. Almost all take GCSE examinations. In 2013, all of the 10 students attained a GCSE pass in English at grades D to G. Two gained a grade C or above in mathematics and seven gained a pass at grades D to G. The remaining student did not attend for the examination.
- You make sure that, wherever they are placed, all students have the opportunity to study for and gain at least five GCSEs or their equivalents, including English and mathematics. You judge that all of the students currently attending alternative provision are making better academic progress because of the success of the providers in supporting them with their personal development and in improving their attendance. Some of the reports from providers about improvements in behaviour and attitudes to learning are anecdotal. One provider assesses improvements using a test. This provides more robust and quantifiable information and means

that progress can readily be measured. Students' academic progress is reported to you regularly and the information added to the academy's tracking system. You do not currently keep a separate record of the progress the cohort of students in alternative provision is making. Although the information is held on individual students, it is harder to see at a glance how much progress the group as a whole is making and therefore to judge accurately the impact of your spending on alternative provision.

- All of the students following vocational courses gain an accreditation. This means that they are well placed should they wish to pursue the subject at the next level. The majority of students who attend college go on to study there after the age of 16. All of the students who attended alternative provision last year at college or elsewhere went on to college, apprenticeship or a job.
- All of the providers are visited regularly. During such visits, students' views are sought and brief observations are made in classrooms and workshops. In addition, subject leaders provide support with the assessment of students' work, where requested. You do not carry out formal observations of teaching and learning on these visits. A member of staff accompanies the students to their college placement. This was valued greatly by the students.
- All of the students spoken to expressed positive views of their experiences. Those attending college said that not only had their horizons been broadened but also that they felt they had grown in confidence.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- working with providers to strengthen their skills in evaluating and reporting students' progress in their personal and social development, so that you have a clear picture of what is improving and what is not
- ensuring that the quality of the educational provision in those providers who are not subject to external inspection is monitored and evaluated regularly and closely by your staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector