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5 June 2014

Mrs L Nicholls
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Nicholls

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 21 and 22 May 2014 with Linda McGill HMI, to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit we met with you, the deputy headteacher who leads on behaviour and attendance, the deputy headteacher who is in charge of teaching and learning and the assistant headteacher who has responsibility for alternative provision. Additional meetings were held with the Connexions advisor to the school, the local authority leader of alternative provision, and representatives from some of your alternative education providers including Flixton Medical Centre and Trafford College. We met with six students who attend alternative provision and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- BUNZL, work placement for students organised through the Bright Futures agency to raise aspirations for the more able students
- Trafford College, Altrincham and Stretford sites

We also visited your on-site Aspire Centre, and met with your Aspire Team who provide a wide range of support for students, including for those at an early stage of learning to speak English and those who require 'catch-up' support due to starting in the school in the middle of an academic year.

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 much smaller number of students are currently engaged in alternative provision than in previous years. This number is set to reduce still further in future cohorts as you adapt your curriculum to reduce the range of work-related courses available. Your main purpose for using alternative provision is to re-engage students in education. From your records it is apparent that these students are now making better progress than was seen before they started their alternative provision. Their behaviour and attendance has also improved and, over time, you have seen a reduction in the number of exclusions and a reduction in the number of alternative provision students who are frequently absent. Work placements also support the development of work-related skills such as confidence and working with others.
- Placements are commissioned using providers who have demonstrated success in working with your students in the past. The local authority does not have a list of approved providers, although there is a website schools can use to find out about providers who meet certain minimum standards in the area.
- The facilities at the providers visited were high quality. Motor vehicle and hairdressing facilities in the college provide access to a wide range of equipment allowing students to develop the skills they will use in the workplace. Good health and safety is a high priority and students are given a detailed induction in this aspect. At BUNZL, students receive a certificate in each of the health and safety modules they complete.
- Providers are given detailed information about students before the provision starts; however your child protection policy is not currently shared with providers. Amongst the information you do give to providers is a 'pen-portrait' about the student summarising their interests and any behavioural or attendance concerns. Attainment levels are provided with information about students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Providers appreciate the support they receive from the school. Concerns over attendance or punctuality are immediately reported to the school and this is followed up by the school through contact with parents. Where students have special educational needs or social and emotional difficulties, this information is shared with providers. Further guidance to support the provider in meeting these particular needs, or successful strategies to encourage good behaviour would be useful.
- Alternative provision is usually built into students' timetables in such a way that students do not miss out on other subjects or experiences in school. More-able students who do miss lessons while on their work placement are highly motivated to catch-up with work missed, in their own time.
- All students who currently attend alternative provision are able to achieve GCSE English and mathematics qualifications. Virtually all students on alternative provision attend their off-site centre for one day each week and are therefore able to continue with their studies in English, mathematics, science and other subjects. Three students attend alternative provision for five days each week but are still entered for GCSE

English and mathematics. There are no students currently working at a level below that of the GCSE examination.

- Of the 2013 Year 11 cohort of 23 students on alternative provision, just one student achieved five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. This remains the case for the current Year 11 cohort of 12 alternative provision students. In 2013 there were five students who made the progress that was expected of them in English and four in mathematics. This is indicated to improve to seven students in English and six in mathematics for 2014. In the 2013 alternative provision group, where students had weak literacy or numeracy skills, they successfully gained accreditation in level 2 functional literacy and numeracy courses.
- In 2013 there were 15 students attending accredited alternative provision courses, all but one of whom were successful in gaining their accreditation. For the 11 students studying accredited courses this year, all are on track to be successful. Alternative provision is therefore providing students with a recognised qualification, which they can then progress to a higher level post-16 course if they choose to do so. In 2013, most students continued with their vocational course through post-16 studies.
- Some students choose to continue their post-16 education at the same college, where they feel familiar with staff and the facilities. The school believes that without this some of these students may not have chosen to continue their education at college as they lack confidence and feel insecure in unfamiliar surroundings. Alternative provision is therefore supporting students in making the next step in their education and increasing their prospects of employment.
- Systems used to monitor the behaviour of students in the school show incidents of unacceptable behaviour have reduced for 24 of the 27 students in Years 9, 10 and 11 on alternative provision, since they started their placement or college course.
- Monitoring of your use of alternative provision is currently carried out each term. However, you have plans to increase the frequency of your visits to every six weeks. Your monitoring includes a rigorous approach to tracking students' academic progress using termly reports written by the provider. Any underachievement is identified and you quickly intervene to address this and to improve progress. Your tracking is robust and you also monitor the progress of the whole group of students on alternative provision which helps you to see the impact of this provision. During visits to providers, as well as observing teaching, you also look at students' work and ask them about their views of their course.
- All students who met with us talked positively about their experiences of alternative provision. They enjoy the course they are studying and feel safe while off the school site. One student who completes catch-up work greatly appreciates the additional support provided by teachers at lunchtimes or after school. Some students lack clarity on the reasons why they were offered an alternative provision place and were therefore not able to recognise the benefits to them, or changes in their behaviour or attendance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- checking for yourself that appropriate safeguarding checks and risk assessments have been carried out for each provider and they are up to date; as currently you rely too much on information you are told by providers without checking the documentation yourself
- giving providers your information regarding child protection procedures and checking they understand the school procedures that must be followed
- ensuring that all students following accredited courses are able to study a course appropriate to their academic needs, as well as meeting their personal needs and interests
- using the findings from your monitoring of the group of students on alternative provision to present to the governing body an evaluative summary of the impact of your spending on alternative provision.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector