

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Ms S Yardley  
Headteacher  
Fountain House  
Fountain Road  
Hull  
HU2 0LH

Dear Ms Yardley

### **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 7 and 8 July 2014 to look at the pupil referral unit's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the engagement manager and other staff. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: North Carr Cuisine, Motorvation and Alcrest Academy.

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**

- Fountain House pupil referral unit (PRU) is effective in commissioning appropriate and safe alternative provision for students. Data provided by the PRU along with discussions held with both students and providers show that students progress well in many areas. Students gain appropriate qualifications, they attend well and demonstrate improvements in their behaviour and attitudes to learning. Nevertheless, it is difficult to judge the overall rate of progress made by students because leaders do not yet use the information they have about them to create a picture of what good or outstanding achievement will look like for each individual.
- The local authority maintains a directory of alternative providers which have attained stringent pre-acceptance standards. The headteacher of the PRU is the Chair of the committee responsible for maintaining this

directory. Consequently leaders have a detailed understanding of the types and quality of alternative provision being provided locally. Only providers who are listed on the directory are commissioned by the PRU as placements for students. Subsequently, there is an effective and clear link between the needs of individual of students on roll at the PRU and suitable alternative provision locally.

- From the beginning of provider registration, the safeguarding of students is a high priority. A detailed analysis of potential providers' safeguarding policy and procedure is carried out by the local authority's safeguarding team. Providers and their staff attend safeguarding training provided by the local authority. Due to a high level of contact between the PRU and the providers, providers have detailed understanding of the PRU's safeguarding and child protection policies. Frequent visits to providers by staff and leaders of the PRU ensure that any concerns about the welfare of students are picked up early and acted upon quickly. As a result students feel confident that they are safe while attending any alternative provision.
- Information about the students being placed by the PRU at an alternative provision is shared with providers prior to enrolment. All students make initial visits to placements and usually these include taster sessions so that students can gain a good understanding of the contents of the programme. Providers spoken with find this induction very useful and were keen to point out that the initial sharing of information is a key factor in allowing the provider to adjust their procedures to meet the individual needs of students. Leaders have rightly identified that the pre-placement information given to the PRU by students' previous schools, is not of a consistently high quality.
- Each student has a personal mentor who makes frequent, in some cases daily, contact with providers. Mentors quickly build an in depth understanding of each student's needs and share this information with providers. Where appropriate mentors provide sensitive information to providers, such as that related to child protection issues, both in writing and verbally. This effective practice allows providers to make ongoing adjustments to their behaviour management strategies when required. Students spoken with are aware of this sharing of information and are unequivocal in their view that the mentors are often key to the success of their placements.
- The curriculum provided by the PRU is designed around access to alternative provision in order to meet the needs of students who have become disengaged from mainstream education. Each student has an individual time table comprising of the core subjects of English and mathematics along with up to three days attendance at alternative provision. Some students also access additional subjects such as science, art and photography at the PRU. Students do not miss out on core subjects due to their attendance at alternative provisions because leaders make effective use of a flexible timetable.
- Leaders are clear that every alternative provision commissioned engages students in industry-standard qualifications which can be used by the

students in their chosen post-16 pathway. As a result all students gain at least a Level 1 vocational qualification, for example, Level 1 diploma in vehicle maintenance or Level 1 diploma introduction to the hair and beauty sector. These qualifications complement students' academic qualifications in English and mathematics at either GCSE or foundation skills level, gained at the PRU.

- Leaders are aware that the proportion of students reaching high levels of attainment do not compare favourably with those in mainstream schools. For example, although in 2013 the majority of Year 11 students gained a pass grade in GCSE English and mathematics, very few gained grade C or above. However, the whole of this cohort of students did achieve a range of appropriate vocational qualifications which, in the large majority of cases, were relevant to their next steps at post-16. Out of a random sample of 27 students, selected by the inspector, 20 had progressed onto courses, training or employment relevant to their qualification; for example one student gained a Level 2 diploma in vehicle maintenance and then secured an apprenticeship with BMW. This represents good progress for the large majority of students.
- Leaders' analysis of data related to the current Year 11 cohort indicates a similar proportion of students to the previous year will attain a grade at GCSE in English and mathematics. All of the current Year 11 students have applied for a place with a training provider or to attend post-16 college. The large majority of these students have applied for placements which relate directly to their vocational qualifications. Leaders have employed a member of staff to monitor and support students as they take up post-16 placements. It is too early to judge the impact of this strategy in supporting the continued progress of students as they leave the PRU.
- All provisions visited by the inspector provide a high standard of suitable accommodation. In all cases the 'workshop' or 'hands on' area provided only industry standard materials and equipment so that students gain experiences which are relevant to employment or further training. Classroom areas are sufficient in size and give ample access to computers and online resources for use in the theory element of courses. Greater access to computers was provided in those provisions which also serve the needs of post-16 students who often take part in online assessment activities.
- Providers spoken with were overwhelmingly positive about the high level of support offered to them by the PRU. Frequent visits by student mentors, along with monitoring visits by the engagement manager and lesson observations by the headteacher, provide valuable and accurate information about the quality of alternative provisions. This information is used well by leaders to identify and improve, where possible, sub-standard practice. Where the required improvements have not been made providers' contracts have been cancelled. This decisive action is contributing to continued improvements in the quality of alternative provision.
- Leaders are aware that they need to do more to track the progress of students in terms of their personal and social development. While leaders

have anecdotal evidence to suggest self-esteem improves as students begin to experience success in alternative provision, they do not yet collect robust data to support this view.

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

- clarifying expectations and requesting improvements in the information the PRU receives about students from their previous mainstream school so that leaders can better track and evaluate how well students are progressing
- strengthening the Individual Learning Plans, currently being developed by the PRU, so that it is clear what good and better progress will look like for each student in terms of academic, vocational and personal development
- tracking the personal and social development of each student so that the impact of any intervention on aspects such as behaviour and self-esteem can be robustly evaluated.

Yours sincerely

**Drew Crawshaw**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**