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Mr V Murray
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Murray

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 11 and 12 June 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I also met students and visited Haydon Training Services Limited and Aylesbury Training Group, two of the providers that your students attend.

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's inclusive policies and practices set a high expectation for the quality of alternative providers and courses used by the school. The school's aim to 'manage your own' is reflected in alternative provision that mirrors the school's own ethos where students are respected and challenged. As a result, virtually all students succeed on their chosen courses, gain recognised accreditation and go on to further education, employment or training.
- Alternative provision is used for a small number of students and utilises a further education college and five trusted training providers. All alternative providers used by the school provide accredited courses at Entry, Level 1 and Level 2, dependent on the course, level of entry and academic ability

of the student engaging in the programme. Courses are under constant review.

- The focus of alternative provision placements is on providing vocational courses that are not available on the school curriculum or to re-engage in education those students who are disaffected with school. Most placements are successful in this respect. Students gain useful qualifications, as well as noticeable improvements in their attitudes to learning and attendance.
- Arrangements for alternative placements are made exclusively through an area network co-ordinated by the local authority. The partnership offers a comprehensive directory to local schools to help them to find the best suitable placements. This also ensures that a minimum set of standards can be met for safeguarding, health and safety and quality of provision.
- Providers are clear about what the school expects of them, for instance with regard to records of students' progress and their attendance. Important areas such as health and safety, safeguarding and students' special needs or personal requirements are covered effectively when setting up placements.
- When considering a placement, the needs of the student come first. The provision is a planned part of a personalised pathway, usually from the start of Year 10. It has clearly defined intentions, which relate to personal and academic outcomes. Students remain a full part of the school. Attending the alternative provision placement does not usually involve missing lessons but is part of the timetable constructed around the group or individuals. When lessons are missed, students are supported to catch up through supervised 'support for learning' classes.
- Child protection policies and procedures are shared between school and providers, and responsibilities in this area are well understood.
- Communication between the school and off-site providers is good. There are clear lines of communication and contact between the school and the providers. Each provider has a dedicated named link member of senior staff who liaises with the placement provider and takes an ongoing interest in the students' progress.
- The school is in regular contact with all providers that are used. Regular visits as well as comprehensive reports ensure that students are meeting expectations and are making progress in their chosen courses.
- Senior staff carefully monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the programme of alternative provision for each student by tracking and analysing indicators of their academic, personal and social development. Reports from the provider offer clear records of the students' personal and academic progress. However, senior staff from the school do not systematically visit to check the quality of teaching and learning.

- Parents are actively encouraged to become involved in decisions around curriculum choice and future pathways. They are regularly informed of their child's progress and are encouraged to visit when appropriate.
- The school ensures that all students attending off-site alternative provision have the opportunity to gain qualifications in English and mathematics. Of the 27 Year 11 students who left in 2013, all gained English and mathematics GCSE at grade A to G, and just over half gained English and mathematics GCSE at grade C or above.
- The school ensures 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. It is expected that, this academic year, around half the students currently on alternative placements are likely to achieve five GCSEs at grades C or above including English, mathematics and a maximum of two accredited vocational qualifications by the end of Year 11. All of the students currently attending alternative provision are making better academic progress than they have in the past because of the success of the providers in supporting them with their academic and personal development and in improving their attendance.
- The school has recently undertaken an audit of provision using the Ofsted survey report about alternative provision to provide a benchmark of success. The result is an informative evaluation, providing very useful pointers for further development.
- Students speak well of their alternative provision. They can see its benefits. For most, it provides a stepping-stone to their future employment or training. For others, it provides a second chance to stay on track. One student said 'I have to walk 50 minutes each way to get to my provider, but it is well worth it!'

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the 'Support for Learning' classes better meet the needs of students on alternative provision courses through direct liaison with the subject teachers
- conducting an annual review of the specification frameworks for alternative courses to verify the accreditation for each course
- arranging for structured feedback from students on their experiences on alternative placements
- developing agreements with providers which set out opportunities for school staff to gather information on the quality of teaching and learning
- reporting on the impact of the use of alternative provision on the school life of students as a discreet group to senior leaders and the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector