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Mr N Condliffe
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Dear Mr Condliffe

Ofsted 2014 15 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 4 November 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher with responsibility for learning support and several members of the extended senior leadership team. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Tameside College, Cruden Construction Ltd., NSPP Vocational Education and Training and City in the Community.

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

- Leaders of Denton Community College effectively commission alternative provision for those students they feel will benefit from an enhanced curriculum opportunity. Leaders are particularly effective in ensuring the ethos of the school, which is built around high quality care, guidance, support and inclusion, is transferred seamlessly into the identification of appropriate alternative providers. Leaders have put in place a robust system to ensure all students remain as safe as possible while participating in alternative provision.
- The school makes its own arrangements for identifying and commissioning suitable alternative providers. However, leaders make good use of their strong links with the local authority for example, by commissioning

alternative provision from a local FE college. Leaders use information from the local authority along with that from other professionals such as social services and the police to evaluate effectively the suitability of providers.

- Leaders give careful consideration to the overall needs of individual students who have been identified as vulnerable, in order to assess how they will benefit from participation in alternative provision. This ensures that both the academic and personal needs of individual students are well matched to the provision selected. For example one student has improved his attendance from very poor to 100% and is making rapid progress in English and mathematics because his placements, at two separate providers, match excellently both his interest in construction and his academic needs.
- Of the four providers visited all provided appropriate accommodation and maintained high safety standards at all times. School leaders insist that providers ensure all students undertake a health and safety induction and providers' own records show that this is adhered to without exception. Where the focus of the provision is vocational skill training there is a good balance between practical experience and opportunities for classroom based studies. Those providers who focus on academic and personal skill development do so in an environment which sets high expectations through high quality and technologically advanced accommodation.
- The quality of the information and training given to the providers is effective overall in helping them to ensure the needs of all students are met. All of the providers I spoke to felt that they had a good understanding of the needs of individual students due to the information provided by the school. However, the method by which specific information is given to providers, about individual students and about the schools own processes, varies. In some instances the school only provides information verbally. Providers find information more useful when it is written. For example only one provider said that they had received a copy of the schools behaviour management policy. Consequently, this provider is able to ensure that its own behaviour rewards system matches well with that of the school while other providers rely more heavily on the verbal prompts of the school's support staff.
- Without exception providers feel that they are well supported by the school. Where the school provides its own staff to support students while on placement providers value the additional knowledge about the personal and learning needs of individual students which this brings. In other circumstances providers said that school leaders act swiftly to respond to any questions they pose and take appropriate action to resolve any issues which may occur.
- Leaders are aware that the bespoke approach towards the use of alternative provision, combined with the relatively low number of students taking part, leads to students missing a small number of lessons. However, leaders have put in place an effective system to ensure students have the opportunity to catch up, particularly in English and mathematics. The students I spoke to felt that they were able to keep up with their peers in lessons because they could catch up at other times. A small

number of students felt their English and mathematics skills had improved because they are now more focused in lessons than before they attended alternative provision. This view was supported by information provided by leaders.

- Leaders place a high priority on ensuring attendance at alternative provision does not prevent students gaining English and mathematics qualifications at the appropriate levels. All students who attend alternative provision for either one or two days each week follow English and mathematics, in school, to GCSE level. All students who attend alternative provision on a full-time basis follow English and mathematics at an appropriate level either with the provider or at a local FE college. Of the six students who took part in alternative provision and left school at the end of last year, all achieved an appropriate qualification in English and mathematics.
- Leaders do not routinely report to governors on the progress of students who attend alternative provision. However, the school's analysis of its own data indicates that the majority of students who are currently attending alternative provision are making good progress across all subjects and areas of personal development. Further analysis by the school of its own records on behaviour, attendance, attitudes to learning and attainment of vocational qualifications shows that the progress, in terms of personal development, of those who attended alternative provision last year was good.
- All six students who attended alternative provision and left last year have secured placement on courses at a local FE college. As these students were all identified as in danger of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), this represents exceptional support for these students. Scrutiny of the school's own records shows that the courses secured by these students represent progress from their starting points at the end of Year 11.
- Without exception, those students spoken with were unequivocal in their support for the use of alternative provision by the school. All the students spoken with feel that they are making good progress as a result of taking part in alternative provision. Students feel that they have not only developed additional work based skills but that their attendance on alternative provision has improved their attitude to school and consequently their academic work is improving. All the students feel safe when attending alternative provision; they know who to speak with if they have concerns because they have a named member of staff to report to.
- The school's monitoring and overall evaluation of the quality of alternative provision is not consistently good. Visits by the school to providers vary in terms of frequency, methodology and the seniority of those monitoring. While leaders have a good overall picture of students' progress they do not have a detailed understanding of the quality of individual providers' impact, neither are they in a position to offer feedback to all providers in how they can improve their provision for students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- introducing a rigorous system, based on the schools own minimum requirements for all providers, by which leaders can monitor and evaluate the quality of all alternative provisions which students attend
- building on the good practice of sharing information about the school and students with providers, so that all students benefit from providers which ensure their practices and expectations match effectively with those of the school
- ensuring that the findings from leaders' monitoring and evaluation are used to identify strengths and possible improvements in practice and to share examples of good practice seen with providers
- reporting on the impact of alternative provision in terms of the academic and personal progress made by this group of students so that governors are able to form a view on the effectiveness of spending on alternative provision.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector