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Mr L Weston
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Weston

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 14 and 15 October 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, the alternative provision coordinator and staff in the behaviour support unit. I also met students and visited both sites used by the following provider that your students attend: Joint Activities and Motor Education Service known as JAMES.

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

- As a member of a group of secondary schools that operate as a Behaviour and Attendance Collaborative (BAC), the school works closely with its partners in commissioning alternative, off-site provision. The collaborative builds on work done previously by the local authority in approving providers and ensures that providers' arrangements for health, safety and safeguarding are of a good standard. The school benefits from the BAC's collective commissioning of an agreed number of alternative provision places.
- The school makes a variety of bespoke arrangements, including courses at the local further education college and work-experience placements, for

the small number of students for whom full-time mainstream schooling is not appropriate. The main considerations in selecting alternative provision are how best to re-engage students in learning and prepare them effectively for education, training and employment beyond school.

- The provider visited runs courses on two sites, the main one of which is spacious and suitable. This is currently being remodelled to accommodate projects which run on its second site, a very small venue with no possibility of providing separate work and social spaces.
- The school completes a detailed referral form, devised by the provider, for each student so that key information about their needs is available before a placement begins. The school shares its safeguarding policy and procedures with providers but individual child protection information is conveyed verbally.
- Links between the school and the provider, which sit within the wider context of the BAC, are strong. Systems are in place for daily communication regarding students' attendance. A member of staff visits providers weekly to check on all aspects of students' progress and ensure that placements are running smoothly. The provider visited is confident of a prompt response should they need to contact the school between weekly visits.
- The school timetables alternative provision through an option block which helps to ensure that students follow a curriculum which meets their individual needs without sacrificing too much breadth. It also gives students time in school to catch up on any work missed when at the off-site provider. Individual support is provided by staff in the behaviour support unit, guided by subject teachers, to ensure that students do not fall behind. Students say this works well for them.
- Students follow functional skills courses in literacy and numeracy through alternative provision, as well as GCSEs in English and mathematics at school. All Year 11 students currently attending alternative provision are expected to gain five GCSEs at grades A*-G and one is expected to gain five GCSEs at grades A*-C. The school judges that the previous Year 11 students on alternative provision made good progress to gain either GCSEs in English and mathematics or in one of these core subjects. Without alternative provision the school considers that these students were at risk of permanent exclusion.
- Students follow a range of courses through alternative provision, according to their individual needs. In the main these are accredited, such as BTEC in health and social care, and can be built on post-16. In some cases, where the prime focus is raising self-esteem and confidence, courses are not accredited but support students to succeed in other qualifications they are taking.

- The school tracks the progress, behaviour and attendance of students on alternative provision in the same way as for all other students. Consequently, leaders are in a good position to evaluate the impact of alternative provision. For example, improvements in the behaviour of the Year 11 alternative provision students last year were clear from the decline in negative behaviour points over a sustained period. A new system for capturing the positives and negatives of students' achievements is currently being piloted, with links to instant texts to parents. At this trial stage, reports from alternative providers are not included.
- The BAC has a quality assurance system in place for alternative providers. Observations of provision are followed up at agreed intervals to ensure that any improvements required are made. Reports are shared and the school's leaders use these to inform their decisions when selecting providers. The provider visited shares its own monitoring reports with the school and is transparent about areas where courses are not moving forward at the expected pace.
- Students are positive about the opportunities they have through alternative provision and enjoy an environment in which they are treated as young adults. They feel that the experience is helping them to improve their behaviour and attitudes both out of school and in school. Some students say that functional skills courses boost their confidence, for instance in mathematics, when in school. Alternative provision has helped students develop realistic post-16 ambitions and, in some cases, a drive to achieve these.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- including the achievements of students when attending alternative provision in the school's new tracking system
- ensuring that information about students' progress which is captured by providers is shared with the school, parents and carers
- aligning the reports from alternative providers with the school's reporting calendar so that parents and carers can gain a full view of their child's progress.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector