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Mr M Anderson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Anderson

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 10 and 11 November 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you and colleagues responsible for this aspect of the school's work including the deputy headteachers, an assistant headteacher, the school's Connexions advisor and the director of inclusion. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- Hugh Baird College
- The Studio
- Everton Football Club 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

- The school is committed to ensuring that the very small number of students who attend alternative provision gain the appropriate skills to prepare them for work and the next stages in their lives. Leaders identify students who may benefit from alternative provision very carefully and placements are well-matched to their interests and needs.

- The school works closely with others in the area as part of a collaborative, which agrees alternative provision and ensures that rigorous checks are carried out before students attend any new placement. Only providers that offer courses and qualifications which lead to recognised routes of progression are considered. Some placements have been discontinued because leaders felt that the qualifications offered did not provide enough opportunity to make further progress.
- A member of staff at the school has recently been trained by the Institution of Occupational Health and Safety to undertake health and safety checks of providers. This will enable the school to source and check new providers where necessary to meet the needs of students in the future.
- Students always follow courses that enable access to a range of post-16 options, including a return to the school's sixth form, if that is appropriate to their needs. For example, two students currently attend part-time provision at Hugh Baird College for two days a week where they are studying an industry accredited course at an appropriate level, which will lead to apprenticeship options.
- Alternative provision is also provided for younger students with particular talents, such as attendance at the Everton Football Club Academy.
- Leaders ensure that students and their parents or carers are able to visit placements to discuss their suitability. Students are then offered 'taster' days and these can either confirm the placement or lead to an alternative offer.
- Sometimes placements are for full-time attendance at other institutions. The school maintains the student on dual registration and continues to track attitudes to learning, attendance and behaviour carefully. These placements are sometimes used as a trial experience prior to a permanent move. In these instances, the school works very well with the receiving institution and maintains full oversight of academic as well as personal progress.
- Placement managers are provided with students' basic personal and emergency contact details and with details of their academic levels where appropriate. All providers I spoke to are very happy with the information provided and the regular contact the school maintains with them. All report that the deputy headteacher and/or the lead learning mentor visit students regularly to check on their progress. Providers say that if any problems arise, they are always able to contact an appropriate person. However, there are no agreed systems for contact so that, over time, incidents have been addressed as they have arisen, rather than foreseen.
- Leaders have frequent meetings with all providers who report regularly on the progress of students in terms of their behaviour and attendance. Progress information tends to focus on personal and social aspects, including attitudes to learning, rather than on academic progress from students' starting points at the end of Key Stage 2. It is therefore difficult for the school to use this data to compare progress with that of other students in the school. In addition, the school does not yet have an agreed protocol for checks on the quality of teaching at placements used.

- In the last three years all students accessing alternative provision have progressed to further education, employment or training.
- Alternative provision is incorporated reasonably well into the school's timetable. Supervised time is provided during the school day for students to catch up with work missed, particularly in English and mathematics, and they can also access after school sessions. However, students do not have access to the full range of curriculum subjects, for instance humanities.
- Each student currently attending alternative provision is studying for GCSEs in English and mathematics and they are on track to achieve at least expected progress in both subjects. The school's internal monitoring shows that they are making significantly better progress in English and mathematics than was the case in previous years, demonstrating the positive impact of their alternative provision.
- The students I spoke to were very positive about their placements. Both the Key Stage 4 students talked of how the placement had improved their other work in school and this was borne out by the school's monitoring information. Students felt that they had more confidence and that the courses they were studying meant that they were being well prepared for work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- agreeing and sharing written protocols for dealing with problems that may arise and in relation to how academic progress is to be reported so that progress of these students can be compared to that of others in the school
- ensuring that visits to placements are part of the school's quality assurance cycle and therefore include checks on the quality of teaching.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector