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Mrs Vanessa Ray
Principal
West Lakes Academy
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Dear Mrs Ray

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 19-20 November 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with your vice principals, and your assistant principal who has responsibility for student welfare. Additional meetings were held with your inclusion centre manager and your home tutor and I talked with a student about her experiences of this provision. I visited the West Cumbria Achievement Zone and met with the centre manager and two students who attend the centre for their alternative provision.

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 academy has changed its use of alternative provision in recent years and now delivers this through a consortium arrangement with 10 other schools including the pupil referral unit, and the local authority, at a single centre which is not registered with the Department for Education. A very small number of the academy's Key Stage 4 students currently access this alternative provision under a full-time arrangement, along with others from other schools. Larger numbers have accessed a wider range of alternative provision in past years.

- Safeguarding and aspects of health and safety related to alternative provision at the Achievement Zone are carried out by centre managers, including pre-employment checks and risk assessments for activities. Centre managers take steps to ensure students are kept safe while they attend the centre and when supervised in off-site activities, however academy leaders do not routinely check that all relevant information and assessments have been updated to reflect recent changes in national guidance.
- Students who are most at risk of permanent exclusion are selected for this provision, to provide small-group tuition with a focus on development of key skills. Students successfully re-engage with education and achieve a range of Level 1 and Entry Level qualifications, but these are not always appropriate to the academic needs of students and may not enable them to progress to the next stage in their education, employment or training.
- Having recently moved from three separate sites, the Achievement Zone is now housed on one site. The accommodation is well-maintained and fit for purpose, providing access to a workshop for motor vehicle studies, a kitchen for catering and a salon for hairdressing courses. Other workspaces are bright and spacious with access to information technology (IT) facilities.
- The directors, who are all school leaders of the consortium schools, have identified the key information that is required by managers and tutors at the centre to enable them to support students effectively. This includes information on interests, medical and any other special educational needs and how to remove barriers to learning as well as academic achievements.
- Directors have developed their own child protection and safeguarding policies which reflect aspects of the policies in place within the group of schools. However, the academy does not routinely share its information on keeping safe in social-networking, awareness of the threats posed by extremist views and how to prevent cyber-bullying.
- Each student has their own key worker at the alternative provision centre who knows students well. Achievement Zone tutors and managers say they are well supported by the academy and key workers share successes or concerns with their one point of contact, the assistant principal.
- Students receive a broad curriculum which supports the development of English, mathematics and information technology, in addition to a range of vocational courses. However, there is an absence of any science teaching which may prevent students being successful in gaining employment in the local area where there is a high proportion of science, technology and engineering industries and health and social care employers. Although the academy uses an in-house approach to accelerate reading, this does not extend to the alternative provision and the teaching of reading and literacy is not developed in a consistent way.

- A progression pathway is provided at the alternative provision centre for any students wishing to remain at the centre post-16, for example in motor vehicle studies, rather than starting courses elsewhere.
- You carry out termly monitoring and evaluation of the quality and use of alternative provision involving two representatives from the consortium over a three year cycle. A wide range of evidence is considered including observations of lessons, checks on students' work in books and portfolios, meetings with students and tutors and checks on the progress being made by students. A detailed report is written which is presented to the directors and used to plan improvements to the provision. Although there is clearly rigour to this approach, information reported to directors may be overly positive and checks on the quality of teaching are not frequent enough to be able to identify if recommendations for improvement are being addressed quickly enough.
- A home tutor has been appointed directly by the academy, who works very effectively with the academy's inclusion centre manager to provide support for students who are experiencing gaps in their education due to medical needs, mental health issues and those on fixed-term exclusions. This short-term or temporary provision ensures that students do not fall behind with their learning at times when they might otherwise disengage with education.
- Students I met with during my visit say they enjoy their time in the alternative provision. Amongst the reasons given was the opportunity to work in small groups, or one to one as was the case with the home tutor. Students say their attendance has improved since taking part in this provision and they have had fewer exclusions or incidents of poor behaviour. This was confirmed by information provided by the academy.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making sure that there are no concerns related to safeguarding by carrying out a scrutiny of a random sample of risk assessments and pre-employment checks as part of your monitoring and evaluation process
- reviewing the curriculum offer for students to make sure that all students in full-time education in alternative provision receive their full entitlement to the curriculum, at a level appropriate to their needs, including the opportunity to gain qualifications in science and to improve their reading where this has been identified as a concern
- agree a common format used by all school leaders in the consortium who are carrying out monitoring activities, so that judgements made are accurate and consistent so that any improvements can be identified.

My concerns about the registration status of the West Cumbria Achievement Zone have been reported to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector