

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



24 November 2014

Ms Vicky Linsley  
Headteacher  
St Mary Magdalene Academy  
Liverpool Road  
Islington  
London  
N7 8PG

Dear Ms Linsley

### **Ofsted 2014 15 survey inspection programme: schools' use of alternative provision**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 and 20 November 2014 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, your director of learning: pastoral and other senior leaders. I also met with the Head of Alternative Provision for Islington, and visited one of the providers, Westminster Kingsway Jobtrain, 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.

The academy uses the borough of Islington's alternative provision service. Provision is co-ordinated and individual providers are quality assured, monitored and evaluated by Islington's alternative provision team. Year 11 students who access alternative provision are removed from the roll of the academy and placed on the roll of New River College which is a pupil referral unit. Currently there are nine Year 11 students from the academy in this situation. There are a further two Year 9 students who have recently started attending Focus Learning Centre.

This letter briefly summarises our discussion at the end of the visit.

### **Strengths of this aspect of the school's work**

- The academy only uses providers which are recommended by the local authority. Senior academy staff are involved in rigorous quality assurance processes which cover aspects such as safeguarding, health and safety,

achievement, quality of teaching and learning, leadership and management and guidance.

- The academy uses full-time alternative provision for students who are at serious risk of permanent exclusion or disengaging with mainstream education. Prior to any students being put forward for alternative provision, extensive support systems are in place to help them remain and to be successful in the academy.
- The academy has amended its curriculum over the past few years to better meet the needs and interests of more students. These changes and the thorough systems of academic and pastoral support, mean that fewer students leave the roll of the school now than was the case in the past.
- There is an extensive system of referral which involves several stages and students receive intensive support and, if possible, remain in the academy. Where this is not possible, or when the students themselves are keen to explore different educational and training opportunities at alternative providers, families, students and other agencies are fully involved in the referral process and in deciding which courses are suitable for each individual. High quality information is gathered and passed on to ensure that providers are fully informed of students' needs and abilities.
- Last year all of the students who were in alternative provision gained qualifications including English and mathematics. This is an improvement on previous years when only about half of the students gained English and mathematics qualifications.
- The qualifications tend to be in functional skills at Level 1 and a minority of students gain GCSEs in English and mathematics. Although this does not represent good academic progress over the course of their secondary education, the school's evidence suggests that students were at risk of leaving education altogether before embarking on their alternative provision courses.
- Other qualifications gained include City and Guilds Construction awards and qualifications in hospitality and catering. Most of the students move onto apprenticeships or further education and the qualifications gained whilst in alternative provision support their next steps in education and training. The number not in education, employment or training is decreasing.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- improving the outcomes and aspirations of students by ensuring that the qualifications they achieve are at an appropriate level
- making explicit the systems for visiting and communicating with alternative providers, particularly those used for younger students.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**