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07 January 2015

Miss Maggie Dunn
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Dunn

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 16 and 17 December 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 senior assistant headteacher for curriculum and the director for alternative provision and careers. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- Enhancement Training
- Oracle Training
- Engage Training
- Doncaster Rovers FC
- Doncaster, Rotherham & District Motor Trades GTA Ltd

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 views the use of alternative provision as an integral part of its work to ensure that all students are able to access appropriate courses and qualifications that meet their needs, abilities and aspirations. There is an effective referral system in place within the school so that students are carefully matched to both providers and qualification routes. In addition,

students and their parents or carers are able to request specific provision. For instance a student aspiring to be a jockey requested a placement at Northern Racing College, which the school was able to arrange.

- The importance of this aspect of the curriculum in the school is reflected in the dedicated post of director of alternative provision and careers. This enables an overview of all alternative provision from planning stage through to impact on students' achievement. The post-holder therefore knows the students very well so that courses are sufficiently challenging and qualification levels are appropriate.
- The school has recently gained the Outstanding Quality Award for Careers Education.
- Only providers who are vetted by the local authority are used by the school. The school checks the course content of the courses offered by providers carefully and only uses those that offer accredited qualifications with clear routes of progression at post-16. Many of the students who attend alternative provision are currently studying courses that provide access to apprenticeships or suitable progression pathways in FE/Sixth Forms.
- The school has clear agreements with providers to check and report on attendance and punctuality. However, in one case, this is not always done as soon as it should be.
- All the providers visited say that students from Ridgewood School are well-prepared for their placements. This is because the member of your staff who leads this aspect of the school's work ensures that students are offered interviews with providers to discuss their suitability and to view the environment and its resources. Often, students are offered 'taster' days or placements.
- The vast majority of alternative provision placements are for one day per week. A very small number of students who have more complex needs have agreements in place for three or more days. Occasionally, provision for students on roll at the school is commissioned directly by the local authority and there is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for monitoring the provision, outcomes and safety of such arrangements.
- Placement managers are provided with students' basic personal and emergency contact details, behavioural, social and emotional issues, where applicable and with details of any literacy or numeracy difficulties. While most providers spoken to are happy with the information provided, a few would like to have more information about academic ability. All providers say that if any problems arise, they are always able to contact the school lead for alternative provision who responds rapidly and appropriately. Most say that there are regular visits to meet with staff and students on placement. However, the school does not yet have a robust enough system for recording these visits and their outcomes, so that sometimes placement managers are not aware of when these have taken place.
- The school requires that all providers report each term on the progress of students in terms of their behaviour, attendance and progress. Until

recently, these reports could be provided in many different formats and tended to focus on personal and social aspects, including attitudes to learning, rather than on academic progress from end of Key Stage 2 starting points. However, leaders have been developing a common reporting protocol for use with all its providers, which complements the school's internal monitoring of students' progress, to enable more detailed tracking of progress for this group of students. The school does not yet have an agreed system for checks on the quality of teaching at placements used.

- Alternative provision is incorporated well into the school's timetable and students have access to a broad curriculum, including the choice of at least one humanities subject. Some adaptation of the curriculum has recently ensured that dedicated time is provided during the school day for students to catch up with work missed, particularly in English and mathematics. Additional intervention sessions are also provided for those who need it.
- All students currently attending one day alternative provision are studying for GCSEs in English and mathematics in school. This year a significant number are expected to achieve a C grade or above in at least one of these subjects. This is because the school is now monitoring these students as a discrete group so that there is more rapid identification of possible underperformance. However, the school does not yet routinely compare Key Stage 4 progress in English and mathematics with past progress in Key Stage 3, in order to measure this aspect of the impact of alternative provision.
- Those students with longer placements are studying for appropriate qualifications in English and mathematics with their alternative providers.
- The students spoken to were very positive about their placements. Without exception, they all felt that these were well-matched to their interests and abilities. Several noted that they felt more motivated to achieve in school, as well as at their placements, because they understood the need for other qualifications if they wanted to progress to apprenticeships or other higher qualifications. One student said that, as a group, he felt they had an advantage over other students in the school because they had a better understanding of the world of work. Another noted that most of them already had post 16 offers for apprenticeships or other courses.
- In the last three years all students accessing alternative provision have progressed to further education, employment or training.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that placements sourced and commissioned by the local authority for students enrolled at the school, enable the school to meet its statutory duty to provide a full time education.

- continuing to develop the monitoring systems to track the progress of students attending alternative provision and ensure that this supports analysis of progress in KS4 compared to that in KS3.
- ensuring that providers have a full picture of students' academic ability and the schools' expectations of progress.
- ensuring that systems are in place to record all visits to providers so that there is a clear trail of contact and monitoring and that these visits include checks on the quality of teaching at appropriate intervals.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector