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Mr T Purcell
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Dear Mr Purcell

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 21-22 January 2015 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the alternative provision lead person, the director of curriculum and the director of inclusion. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Bolton College, Training For Today and Mojo Trust.

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's commissioning of appropriate and safe alternative provision for students is effective. Information provided by the school along with discussions held with school leaders, students and providers shows that students progress well overall. Students gain appropriate qualifications, they attend well and demonstrate improvements in their behaviour and attitude to learning. However, leaders do not use the information they have about these students to provide a picture of what good or outstanding achievement will look like for each individual. Furthermore, leaders do not report on the achievement of this group of students to governors. It is therefore difficult to judge accurately the overall rate of progress made by students who attend alternative provision.

- Leaders use their involvement in a number of partnerships with other schools effectively to share information about providers. Leaders seek advice about potential providers, for example following a visit to the provider by the Bolton West Consortium Co-ordinator, so that they can make informed decisions about future placements. Accordingly, all of the providers I visited had detailed procedures in place for both the safeguarding and health and safety of students.
- The school is effective in ensuring that the provision is selected to match individuals' academic, personal and aspirational needs. The school's use of alternative provision is seen by leaders as an integral part of the whole school curriculum. Therefore, only students who leaders feel will have a substantial benefit from a vocational experience are selected to attend alternative provision. Careful consideration is given by leaders to the impact of alternative provision on students' curriculum entitlement in school. Robust procedures are in place to ensure that on the few occasions when students miss key subjects, they are given ample opportunity to catch-up. Consequently, all of students spoken to were able to give instances of personal improvement. For example, one student said her self-confidence had improved while another said that his behaviour in school was now much better and this was helping him concentrate on learning more than before he joined alternative provision.
- All of the providers used by the school use industry standard training facilities to deliver their respective courses. This ensures that students gain the appropriate skills necessary to support them in their next steps in education or employment. The school's data show there is a good match between students' vocational qualifications and their pathway choices. Furthermore, the schools own data also show that all of the students who attended alternative provision last year went on to further education, training or employment.
- Without exception, all of the providers spoken with felt that they were well supported by the school. All felt that school responded quickly and appropriately to any concerns they raised about individual students. However, there was a common opinion amongst the providers that the written information given prior to the placement of students could be more detailed particularly for those students with behavioural and social difficulties.
- The school quite rightly places a high priority on ensuring all students develop their basic skills effectively. Evidence provided by the school shows that all of the students who attend alternative provision continue to follow English and mathematics at an appropriate level. The school's data show that almost all students who attended alternative provision last year attained English and or mathematics at GCSE grade G or above. Many of the students I spoke to said that being involved in alternative provision has helped them understand why they need English and mathematics skills.
- It is clear, from listening to students, that they feel overwhelmingly positive about their experience of alternative provision. All those I spoke

to felt that they had made progress in some way, be that in their behaviour, their academic achievement or their social skills. All had a clear pathway of what they wanted to do when they leave school and all were clear how alternative provision was helping achieve that goal. A small number though, were able to identify potential improvements to the way leaders manage alternative provision. For example, some students felt that leaders should ask for their views more often while others felt that the technical language used by some tutors was difficult and that they struggled to make progress because of this.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the rigour with which leaders monitor and evaluate the use and impact of alternative provision
- ensuring that a robust system is in place, including systematic visits to alternative provision venues, to allow leaders to make informed judgements about the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures and the safety and suitability of accommodation
- listening frequently to the views of students who attend alternative provision as a means of identifying areas of strength or for improvement
- ensuring that expected outcomes for individual students are identified early so that leaders can track the academic, personal and social development progress of each student
- using the information gleaned about the progress of individual students to inform leaders' analysis of the overall impact of alternative provision
- introducing a reporting mechanism so that governors are able to scrutinise effectively leaders' judgements on the effectiveness of alternative provision.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector