

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



29 January 2015

Mr N Dimbleby
Headteacher
Altwood CofE Secondary School
Altwood Road
Maidenhead
Berkshire
SL6 4PU

Dear Mr Dimbleby

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 with Mark Capel, Associate Inspector, on 27–28 January 2015 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the director of student support, and staff from the school's Raising Achievement Centre. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- The Green Room
- Learning to Work, and its work placement partners at St Edmund Campion Primary School, LADDS Garden Village, and Sixbay Garage

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 makes alternative off-site provision for a very small number of students in Key Stage 4 whose learning has been adversely affected by behavioural, attendance, medical, social or emotional difficulties. Placements are commissioned through a few trusted and reputable local providers, who give good attention to students' on-site safety and safe working practices. School leaders, however, are not sufficiently aware of the conditions of the service level agreements with providers, especially

with respect to the defining of responsibilities between the school and providers for the monitoring of students on work placements.

- Some uncertainty currently prevails over the local authority's role in managing alternative provision, following the closure of the local pupil referral unit in a recent review. A new leader has been appointed to develop a new strategy for schools within the authority.
- Provision has been well-designed to meet students' personal and academic needs. The majority of students involved attend work placements for half a day, which are organised to have minimal effects on their learning in academic GCSE subjects. Some students are relieved of a GCSE option to clear time for the placements, and value the consequent reduction in academic pressures. Those who do miss lessons, mainly in options and rarely in mathematics or English, praise the support they are given to 'catch up'. For those on full-time provision in the Green Room, a local independent school for alternative provision, the curriculum offers a rich mix of opportunities for academic and personal development.
- Accommodation in the placements, including in workplace settings, is well-appointed and subject to regular and rigorous safety checks.
- Providers are given very good and detailed referral information on a student's behavioural, social, emotional, and academic background before the placement begins. This allows the risk of the placement to be assessed accurately and staff in the provider to be well-prepared to work with the students. As a consequence, most students develop very good working relationships with staff and managers, and many have sought advice on career developments, including apprenticeships. However, although staff in work placements know to report any concerns to their line manager, they are not all fully aware of the school's procedures and expectations about child protection. There is also a lack of clarity about how and who to notify when a student does not attend a work placement.
- The Green Room has collaborated closely with the school to ensure that provision works effectively for students on full-time provision. However, not all employers at work placements feel that the school engages well enough with them to check on students' progress. This is linked to the recent absence of a member of staff with this responsibility.
- All students on alternative provision are studying for GCSE accreditation in English and mathematics. In 2014, all five Year 11 students gained GCSE at grades D to G in English, although only three did so in mathematics. These students did not gain any other mathematics qualifications, and generally their progress was well below that expected, especially in mathematics. In the current Year 11, all seven students have already gained iGCSEs at grades A to E in English, with four at grades C and above. Again current progress remains generally well below that expected in mathematics.

- Most students make good progress in their personal, social and employability skills, including improving their attendance. Students and staff at placements spoke particularly positively about the development of students' confidence in working with other staff and clients. Parents also write very positively about these outcomes for their children in the evaluations of alternative provision that they are asked to complete. The school tracks personal development outcomes in terms of behaviour, attitudes and attendance at school. However, the format for written reports from work placements does not clearly chart the progress students are making in such personal and employability skills, and students do not gain formal accreditation from their placements. Students' progress in their placements is not currently reflected in school reports to parents.
- As a result of their placements and their attendance at associated careers events, students develop a particularly good understanding of careers pathways and opportunities in specific occupational areas. This ensures that all students move into further education, training or employment, and some gain apprenticeships in occupational areas linked to their placements.
- The school keeps comprehensive records of the placement experience of students who have followed alternative provision, and these show that in the past school staff liaised regularly and effectively with providers to monitor students' progress on their placements. However, staffing changes have led this monitoring to lapse. The school does not visit placements to check on the quality of teaching or training.
- Students are highly positive about their experiences on alternative provision. They feel that it has boosted their confidence and personal development. They also note that, by having a much clearer understanding of careers destinations and entry requirements for specific occupations, it has given them a greater incentive to make better academic progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that staff in work placements are fully aware of child protection requirements and procedures for reporting students' absence
- clarifying responsibilities of monitoring student progress and attendance at work placements through detailed scrutiny and/or review of service level agreements with the provider
- strengthening students' academic progress, especially in mathematics
- improving procedures for tracking, reporting and celebrating students' progress in their personal and employability skills on their work placements.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector