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Mr J Platten
Principal
The Open Academy
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Dear Mr Platten

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 28 and 29 January 2015 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision.

During the visit I met with you, the vice-principal, the Chair of the Governing Body, the futures coordinator and the alternative provision coordinator. I met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Anglia Academy of Hair (AAH), Norfolk Training Services (NTS) and Action Community Enterprises (ACE).

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 academy's work

- Staff at The Open Academy and at the alternative providers work well together to check that students are safe and confident. Procedures for child protection are well understood. Students say that they are well looked after and are confident to discuss any worries.
- The selection of students for alternative provision is well thought-through. Alternative provision is one of three pathways for Key Stage 4 students and selection for that pathway is as rigorous as for other career pathways. The selection process works well to make sure that the provision matches students' aspirations, aptitudes and attitudes well.

- Following the selection of students, alternative providers are commissioned to meet the demand. This is very different to the use of alternative provision in the past. Over the past four years, and in tandem with curricular developments across Key Stages 3 and 4, the academy has reduced the amount of time students spend off-site and raised expectations for the qualifications students will achieve through alternative providers.
- Students attend alternative provision typically for one day each week, sometimes two days, and this works well to give sufficient time to complete other studies. Alternative provision is expected to help students achieve their target grades for at least five GCSEs, including English and mathematics.
- Alternative providers offer students opportunities to gain work skills, relevant vocational qualifications and work habits that will prepare them well for the next stage in their chosen career pathway.
- Students attending alternative provision feel well supported to achieve well on the vocational courses and to catch up with the lessons missed while off-site. Students particularly value the extra lessons for English and mathematics. Staff responded quickly when some students said recently that they were finding it hard to keep up with their science studies.
- In 2014, all five students attending alternative providers achieved GCSE grades D-G in English and mathematics, which is in line with their target grades. All went on to post-16 courses or training at levels that will build on their achievements.
- Nine of the 15 students currently in Key Stage 4 are on track to achieve their target grades for English and mathematics GCSEs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching, academic achievement and personal development systematically for students attending alternative provision
- ironing out the variability in the quality of recording, reporting and targeting students' progress by alternative providers and ensuring that it is always helpful in making sure that students move on fast enough in their personal development or academic and vocational skills.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector