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Mr J Barker  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Barker

**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 10-11 February 2015 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you and a deputy headteacher and also with the Year 11 pastoral manager, the student development officer and an assistant headteacher. I scrutinised documentation provided by the school. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Works4U, SK1 Arts and The Pendlebury Centre.

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**

- Marple Hall School is effective in commissioning appropriate alternative provision. Leaders give careful consideration to the specific needs of students when identifying suitable alternative provision. Only those students who are likely to benefit in terms of improved academic performance and or personal development are offered the opportunity to take part in the alternative curriculum.
- Consequently, while the proportion of students who attend alternative provision is small, success rates are high. This was illustrated well by the conversations I had with students. All those I spoke to felt that they had improved both academically and socially, their confidence had grown and

that they were able to concentrate more on learning. This view was corroborated by the school's own data which show appropriate rates of improvement in academic subjects, behaviour, attendance and social skills for this group of students.

- Leaders make appropriate use of their links with other schools, such as those in the 'Pupils at Risk of Exclusion' network, along with the local authority, to verify the suitability of potential providers. This ensures that adequate measures to keep students safe are in place before students begin their placement. Leaders were able to demonstrate to me how they intend to use more frequent checks of providers' safeguarding systems to strengthen further the safety of all students.
- I visited the premises of three providers. All offered a safe environment for students to work in. However, they vary in overall quality from buildings in need of restoration to high specification teaching areas equal in standard to those expected in a mainstream school. Leaders are aware that they need to put systems in place to enable them to judge for themselves the fitness for purpose of any premises visited by students from the school.
- All of the providers I spoke to felt that the information they are given about students' specific needs is adequate for them to draft a support plan for each student. The methods used by the school to pass on appropriate referral information include a combination of written forms, telephone calls and meetings. This variation leads to inconsistency in the quality of information given to providers about students' specific needs. For example, information given to one provider about the needs of students is always detailed and helpful due to a precise referral procedure. However, the information given to another provider is patchy and limited in its usefulness because referral forms are not detailed and written records are not made following telephone conversations about the specific needs of students. Leaders are aware that they need to apply their best practices to all providers.
- All of the providers spoken to were able to identify a named person as their key contact at Marple Hall School. Also, all of the providers were confident that the school responds quickly and appropriately to their concerns about students. The school's swift action to support providers contributes effectively to ensuring placements are successful overall.
- The vast majority of students who attend alternative provision do so as one of their option choices. This group of students benefit from a timetable which includes additional specialist teaching time in both English and mathematics. Consequently, alternative provision is an integral part of a well-balanced whole school curriculum.
- Leaders place a suitably high emphasis on students achieving the basic academic skills required for their next steps beyond school. All students follow both English and mathematics at an appropriate level either in school or with their alternative provider. Out of the 39 Year 11 students which attended alternative provision last year, 38 of them attained a pass

grade in both English and mathematics. Five of these students gained five A\*- C grades, including English and mathematics, at GCSE level.

- The large majority of students who attend alternative provision work towards nationally recognised vocational qualifications in a range of areas including hairdressing, motor vehicle maintenance, construction, child development and sport. A high proportion of these students are working towards Level 2 qualifications. All of the students spoken to felt that their qualification would support their choice of post-16 pathway.
- All of the students I spoke to were positive about their experiences while attending alternative provision. These students, all of whom were following a vocational qualification, felt they had made or were making good progress both academically and personally. A small number of students said that they now saw a reason for learning while in school and that they worked harder in school than they did before joining alternative provision. Other students felt that attendance at an alternative provision had helped them improve their social skills. These students said they were now able to access the school curriculum because their behaviour is much better than before they attended alternative provision.

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

- ensuring leaders introduce a robust system to allow them to monitor accurately the quality of every alternative provision which students from Marple Hall School attend
- ensuring that leaders analyse data related to students' progress and evaluate the impact of alternative provision with the same rigour they apply to all other students and groups of students within the school
- ensuring the elements of good practice observed during my visit, for example the depth of pre-placement information about the specific needs of students provided to the Pendlebury Centre, are applied consistently well to all providers.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**