

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mrs S Wilson
Headteacher
The Blandford School
Milldown Road
Blandford Forum
Dorset
DT11 7SQ

Dear Mrs Wilson

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 2– 3 March 2015 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers, the business manager, behaviour manager and the special educational needs co-ordinator. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Rylands Care Farm and Equilibrium.

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 has worked closely with other schools in the North Dorset Partnership to commission alternative provision and to ensure that it is of a suitable quality.
- Alternative provision is chosen carefully and is particularly successful in meeting the personal needs and interests of students. Students are prepared well for making their choices through visits and 'taster' sessions.
- The school timetable is planned effectively so that students choose to attend courses available at alternative provision alongside other optional courses offered in school. This ensures that all students follow a balanced curriculum which leads to a broad range of qualifications.

- The accommodation and resources available at the off-site provision are of a good standard and support learning effectively. Staff at the provision are enthusiastic, highly skilled and have a very good understanding of students' needs. They send the school regular progress reports on students' achievement, effort and attendance; although the reports from one provider lack detail.
- Appropriate health and safety and safeguarding arrangements are in place at the off-site provision. Managers at both alternative providers are well-qualified and experienced in child protection procedures. They report that the school prepares students well for attending alternative provision and that school staff are readily available should any issues arise.
- Students who attend alternative provision are able to achieve qualifications in English and mathematics at the appropriate level. The school's analysis of its data indicates that the majority of students who are currently attending alternative provision are making expected progress in their GCSE courses. All students who left school at the end of 2014 and who had used alternative educational provision gained a GCSE pass in English and almost all gained a pass in mathematics.
- The school has some evidence to show that individual students are improving their personal and employability skills through attendance at alternative provision. Students also feel that this is the case. However, arrangements for recording formally students' improvements in this area are underdeveloped. The courses studied provide a clear pathway to further training or work. All students who left school in 2014 progressed to further training, study or an apprenticeship linked to their work-related qualifications.
- The school keeps its use of alternative provision under regular review to ensure it is adapted to meet the changing needs of students who enter the school. It collects a good range of information on students' academic progress, attendance and destinations when they leave to help evaluate the impact of provision. Staff visit alternative provision at least once each academic year and there are also regular discussions between students and key staff in school to check on students' learning. The school does not have systematic arrangements for making visits and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning regularly throughout the year.
- Students have very positive views about their experience at the off-site provision, which is demonstrated by their high attendance. They feel it helps to provide greater variety in their school week. Typical comments were 'It's something you look forward to'...and 'It releases some of the pressure.' Students like learning in a practical way and are particularly appreciative of the skills of the staff at the alternative provision. They recognise that they are developing skills that will help them secure future employment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- visiting and monitoring more systematically the quality of teaching and learning at off-site provision
- receiving more detailed reports on students' progress from one provider
- recording more formally the gains students make in developing their personal and employability skills.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector