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Mr A Nicholas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Nicholas

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 17-18 March 2015 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher with responsibility for the curriculum, the director of the achievement centre, a governor and a group of Year 11 students. I observed a horticultural assessment session involving Year 10 students. I also met the coordinator of the EDDY project (Engage·Divert·Develop·Young People), as well as the horticultural trainer.

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 a clear rationale for incorporating alternative provision into the curriculum, set out in a statement that is reviewed annually. The rationale is shared by staff and governors, and there is a strong sense of common moral purpose in providing appropriately for the individual needs of students.
- The school works successfully with two established providers to customise alternative provision so that experiences offered off-site are combined with learning in school to lead to recognised qualifications. The providers' aims are closely aligned to those of the school.

- The school conducts an annual safeguarding audit that includes checks on alternative providers. Requirements and procedures are thorough and systematic. Providers and the school have shared their respective safeguarding policies so there is clarity about expectations and reporting routes. Risk assessments for activities and transport are detailed. Appropriate safety clothing is provided for students when they participate in activities.
- The provision is intended primarily to meet students' personal development needs. The practical nature of the off-site activities and the challenges they present, for instance in learning to climb, are designed to increase students' motivation and engagement in learning more widely. A balanced and varied curriculum that includes different ways of learning has been put together, with the flexibility to respond to individuals' subject preferences. The academic demands of the alternative provision courses are appropriate.
- The school shares with providers a range of relevant information about students' learning needs, as well as the amount and type of academic and pastoral support they have received by the end of Key Stage 3. This gives providers a reasonable picture of levels of need. However, academic levels and targets could be shared in writing earlier in the programme. Some information about safeguarding students is also shared verbally.
- Alternative provision is built into the timetable as an option so students do not miss teaching in other subjects when off site. The taught components of both the courses contained in this curriculum option are delivered in school.
- All alternative provision students follow GCSE courses in English and mathematics in school. In 2014, all 10 students on this pathway gained a GCSE in English at grades D to G. Eight students gained a GCSE in mathematics at grades D to G while one student gained a grade C. In the current Year 11 cohort, three students are on track to gain a grade C in GCSE English or mathematics, or both. Eight are expected to gain grades D to G in both subjects.
- The school's data shows that, overall, these students are not making the nationally expected rate of progress. However, the school judges that alternative provision has had a positive impact on their attitudes to learning, their behaviour and their aspirations. The school's tracking and reporting systems show that a number now need much less support to regulate their behaviour, although low attendance remains an issue for several. The behaviour and achievements of this group of students are tracked in the same way as that of their peers. However, while any negatives that occur off site are logged, positives are less likely to be recorded.
- The qualifications students gain in horticulture, personal effectiveness and employability skills are nationally recognised and provide a sound basis for

their next steps, post 16. It was evident in discussion that current Year 11 students now have ambitions to pursue college courses or gain apprenticeships linked, in the main, to the experiences they have had through alternative provision. In 2014, all alternative provision students went on to college courses or apprenticeships. About half chose to build on the skills they had learned through the horticulture projects.

- The school and providers work very closely together to deliver the qualifications jointly. Staff monitor the delivery of the practical elements either through accompanying students to a provider on all occasions or through regular visits. Students' progress is monitored although only their progress in the ASDAN COPE course is included in the school's regular tracking and reporting.
- The performance of students on alternative provision is included in the school's self-assessment cycle, which incorporates an annual review of examination results. Consequently, it forms part of the headteacher's reports to the governing body. Information about academic performance is accompanied by case studies so that governors can gain a view of the impact of alternative provision on the wider achievements of individual students.
- The students I spoke to were enthusiastic about the opportunities they have to learn and meet challenges through off-site provision. They recognise that they are in some ways privileged to be able to learn to climb or to work on the mechanics of go-karts as part of the curriculum. Students say that such activities have helped to improve their motivation in other lessons and had a positive impact on their behaviour. They value the qualifications they are gaining through alternative provision and, together with the experiences, say these put them in a better position to choose what they will do post-16.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making sure that sufficient written information is shared with providers to ensure that they are fully alert to any safeguarding risks faced by individual students
- adding the City and Guilds Practical Horticulture Skills course to regular reports on students' progress
- ensuring that the successes of students on alternative provision courses are recognised and included in the whole-school tracking system.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector