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29 April 2015

Ms J Rockall  
Executive Headteacher  
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Berkshire  
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Dear Ms Rockall

### **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 27 April to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with the heads of school and the deputy headteacher. I also met students and visited Pitstop, part of Haybrook College, a provider that your students attend.

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's commissioning of safe and appropriate off-site learning is effective. The relationship with other schools through the Slough Association of Secondary Headteachers (SASH) has enabled you to source Haybrook College as a suitable provider of off-site learning. Haybrook College has robust procedures in place to ensure that alternative provision meets the requirements for the safeguarding, health and safety of students.
- You have decided to use only one provider, Pitstop, which is part of Haybrook College. This provision is carefully matched to the needs of students. The recruitment process mid-way through Year 9 is very thorough. Students are invited to taster sessions and parents have the opportunity to meet the course tutors. All students write a letter of

application followed by an interview with Pitstop tutors. The school and tutors together then consider carefully the personal and academic needs, interests and aspirations of each student; this ensures that the appropriate students are placed on the course.

- Pitstop delivers a range of vocational courses in motor mechanics in very high quality, purpose-built facilities. In addition to a well-equipped workshop, there is a classroom for quiet study and computer work. These facilities are very well organised and clearly operate safe work practices through established routines that students learn early on in the course. During my visit to Pitstop I observed students dressed appropriately, working highly effectively with their tutors and operating safely in this working environment.
- You provide Pitstop with very comprehensive written information about individual students. This information is a key part of the successful way in which Pitstop tutors provide induction to the course and ensure that all students develop safe working practices. Individual risk assessments are in place and are updated regularly. Pitstop are very well supported by the school. You respond quickly and appropriately to any concerns that may arise.
- Timetables have been carefully constructed to ensure that interruptions to students' study in other subjects is minimised. Students attend all English and mathematics lessons in school. However, students do miss time in one or sometimes two other GCSE subjects to attend the course at Pitstop. In order to ensure that students do not fall behind in these subjects all students have timetabled 'catch-up' sessions. When talking with students they felt strongly that these sessions improve their progress if the sessions are led by subject specialists, however this is not always the case. In addition, current Year 11 students expressed concern that as their first examination approaches they may be missing out on key revision to attend Pitstop.
- The progress and behaviour of students at Pitstop is reported to the school weekly and more detailed reports with tutor comments are provided at the end of each term. These reports record an academic and behaviour score. This information is integrated into your school tracking and reporting systems, however, you acknowledge the further benefits of analysing the progress of these students as a distinct group for the purposes of evaluating the impact and value for money of this provision. An evaluation of the use of alternative provision is not formally presented to governors.
- Evidence provided by the school indicates that all students who attended alternative provision last year were successful in achieving GCSEs in English and mathematics at grade G or above. This year you are predicting similar success. Although attainment is low compared to national averages, students are making good progress from their starting points.
- The course delivered at Pitstop provides a clear pathway for students who wish to continue their study. Half of the students who had completed their

course last year at Pitstop continued their motor mechanics study at Level 2 and Level 3 at post-16.

- The school quite rightly places high regard on the additional skills that students develop from their experiences at Pitstop. For example, developing self-discipline, confidence, communication skills, and resilience are invaluable skills in preparing students for the world of work. The school acknowledges that this is a vital part of the personal development of each student. However, the school does not have an effective way of tracking these skills that encourages students to reflect on their development in these key areas.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of alternative provision is undertaken by SASH. The school does not check formally on the quality of teaching; however, Haybrook College has very rigorous systems of observations in place and regular student voice opportunities that are shared with all schools through SASH. You acknowledge that you could seek students' views yourselves and agree through SASH how all schools can take a more proactive role in monitoring this provision collectively.
- Students are overwhelmingly positive about their experience at Pitstop. They are very engaged as a result of high quality teaching and the interactive way in which they learn challenging theory through applying it immediately in the workshop. Students are very complimentary about the excellent subject knowledge of their tutors, and the quality of feedback they receive to ensure that they are successful. Students are also able to describe the additional skills that they are developing whilst working alongside professionals in a different setting from school. However, students do not feel that their achievements at Pitstop are sufficiently shared back at school in order to use these areas of development in other subjects. Some students felt that school should ask about their views more often in order for students to have a way of reflecting on their experiences at Pitstop.

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

- ensuring that systems are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative provision throughout the academic year and share the judgements reached by leaders with governors for further scrutiny
- tracking students' personal and social development in a way that provides opportunities for them to reflect on and recognise the additional skills they are gaining which will benefit them in their future working lives
- regularly seeking students' views so that leaders can identify the strengths of the alternative provision and any improvements that could be made
- ensuring that the mechanisms for catching up work missed from other subjects are robust so that students feel confident and fully prepared for their examinations.

Yours sincerely

**Helen Reeves**  
**Associate Inspector**