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Dear Dr Sievewright

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 12 and 13 May to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, your deputy headteacher, and an assistant headteacher. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- The Portobello Rugby Trust
- Jubilee Academy
- Redwood College
- West Thames College

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 school is thorough in its pursuit of appropriate and timely alternative provision. As a result of the extensive transport links in London you have available a wide range of full and part-time provision across a variety of specialisms from which you carefully select to meet the very diverse needs of your students.

- The local authority commissions some of the alternative provision that you use through 'Education other than at school' (EOTAS), an annual publication of providers. The local authority has robust procedures in place to ensure that alternative provision meets the requirements for the safeguarding, health and safety of students. In addition to this your own processes to establish partnership agreements with alternative providers that operate outside of the borough are thorough and robust.
- Alternative provision is carefully selected to fit with the needs and aspirations of the students. You have developed a very clear rationale for the use of alternative provision for your students. The decision to access full-time or part-time provision is taken only after an extensive range of interventions from within school and other work in collaboration with external agencies to support the more vulnerable students that you work with. In many cases the use of alternative provision is proving an effective strategy to prevent students being permanently excluded. These students are attending placements where they are achieving well and as a result feel more positive about their education. Occasionally, pupils on full-time placements do not receive enough hours of teaching each week.
- Students complete a range of accredited academic and vocational courses at Level 1 and or Level 2 that are tailored to meet their needs and interests. Pathways are carefully designed to promote long-term success and support students to continue with their studies post-16.
- All provision used by the school is in purpose built or newly refurbished accommodation. All of the sites offer excellent working environments for both academic classroom-based study and practical workshop facilities. Students have access to a range of specialist spaces for construction, engineering, music technology, computers, as well as social spaces and sporting facilities.
- The providers visited are overwhelmingly positive about the thorough exchange of information about the students prior to the start of the placement. Providers all have robust risk assessment procedures in place and these are reviewed regularly throughout the duration of the placement. Where necessary, providers have received appropriate information about any child protection concerns and have been able to use this information to ensure that the students' needs are catered for and that appropriate risk assessments are in place. Providers know who to report any safeguarding concerns to, if there is a need to do so.
- All of the providers I spoke to felt that they are well supported by the school responding quickly and appropriately to any concerns raised about individual students. However, where students were attending full-time placements they do not have enough contact with school. Providers are proactive in the involvement of students' parents or carers before placements are agreed and throughout the duration of the course. Providers communicate regularly to the school and parents regarding attendance, attitude to learning and progress.

- The school ensures that all students accessing alternative provision continue to study English and mathematics. Attainment in English and mathematics is low, however from their below average starting points students make good progress. The school's data indicates that this is an improvement on the previous year.
- Students on part time provision are timetabled together as a discrete group when in lessons back at school. This enables them all to receive mentoring and careers advice and guidance one afternoon a week, and continue their studies in other subjects uninterrupted by their time out of school.
- All students receiving both full- and part-time provision are on track to complete their courses. The school monitors students' progress closely and have, when required, acted quickly to change individual placements to improve the progress that some students are making. The school receive detailed and regular progress reports from providers to inform their own tracking processes.
- The alternative provision accessed by the school has ensured that many students are able to complete their education to the end of Year 11 and establish a clear pathway beyond their studies at 16. Many students' attendance and attitudes to learning have improved, contributing significantly to their likely outcomes at the end of their course. All current Year 11 students have offers for further study; a small proportion of students are continuing their subjects from their alternative provision placement to a more advanced level.
- The school quite rightly places a high value on the additional skills that students develop from their experiences of alternative provision. 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 and evidence presented through a number of case studies demonstrates the significant impact of this provision on students' behaviour, attitudes and attendance when they are given the opportunity to study away from school on courses carefully selected for them. This enhanced personal development is not systematically shared with students to encourage them to reflect on their progress in these key areas.
- The academic outcomes of students attending both full- and part-time provision are tracked thoroughly by leaders and governors, contributing to judgements regarding the cost effectiveness of this provision. However, leaders do not have sufficient systems in place across their providers to evaluate the quality of teaching or regularly listen to the views of students as part of the school's self-evaluation processes.

- The students attending alternative provision all understand why they are studying away from school and the opportunity they have been given to develop aspects of their behaviour and attitude to their learning. Some students were able to explain the differences in these aspects, and see how this improvement has contributed to them feeling more positive and confident about themselves. All students have been well supported, as they come to the end of Year 11, to find college places for September. Some students felt strongly that they would benefit from more regular visits from school, and more opportunities to discuss their experiences on alternative provision with their teachers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the rigour with which leaders evaluate the use and impact of alternative provision by ensuring that robust systems are in place to make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching
- ensuring that all students on full-time placements are receiving their statutory entitlement to a full-time education
- listening regularly to students views so that leaders can identify the strengths and improvements of the alternative provision
- exploring effective ways to track and celebrate students' personal and social development throughout their experiences in alternative provision.

Yours sincerely

Helen Reeves
Associate Inspector