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20 February 2013

Dr J Frain  
Headteacher  
South Shields Community School  
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Dear Dr Frain

### **13 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 6 and 7 February 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with staff at the school and at the unit where Skill Force support groups of students from across the local authority who are likely not to complete their education at school. I talked to students and analysed documentation. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: the SureStart Nursery, Biddick Hall and the kitchens at Holy Trinity Simonside Primary and Harton Primary School and held a telephone call with the proprietor of Garden Lane Garage.

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 works very well with students who arrive at the start of Year 7 with standards which are well below average. These are often the students who benefit from the alternative provision by visiting a work place each Friday during Year 11.
- The timetable is planned so that students who attend alternative provision do not miss any lessons for their other options or for either English or mathematics. They all complete a GCSE in mathematics and English as well as other courses and they are not disadvantaged when off-site.

- These students are well-supported back in school where they work together in class to complete work-related courses; for example a Certificate in Personal Effectiveness (CoPE). This uses their experiences from their placements to develop better work related skills.
- Students' work with the providers often helps them to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Activities such as reading technical manuals, understanding different types of books and adapting language when reading aloud to young children and using scales and proportions in the kitchen all contribute
- The school gives a good range of information to providers, including any particular learning or social needs. Providers are very praiseworthy of the excellent support they receive from the school. A member of staff telephones each placement every week to get feedback on how well the students have worked and also visits the placements every few weeks.
- Students report that they enjoy their placements, they find the work challenging and it helps them become better prepared for the world of work. One student said she had a lot better understanding of healthy living and this helped her with her food technology course.
- The group of students who attend the unit enjoy the variety of activities they cover with Skill Force. Relationships with staff are good. All students complete work based and public services qualifications as well as GCSE mathematics and English. When the unit cannot meet the specific needs of individuals, additional support is provided by the school.
- Students at the unit develop improved social skills and the ability to work with adults. These, along with the academic qualifications, prepare them well for the next stage in their education or the world of work.

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

- incorporating the experiences of the students while on their placements into more lessons when back in school to give greater value to the activities students complete when off-site.

Yours sincerely

**Michael Smith**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**