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Mr C Sheeran  
Principal  
Cowley International College  
Hard Lane  
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Dear Mr Sheeran

### **Ofsted 2013 14 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 26 and 27 September 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I examined a range of documents and met with the assistant headteacher with responsibility for alternative provision, several students, and representatives of the local authority. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: Instant Training (construction); KSA Education and Training; and Aspire Training.

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 college makes a clear distinction between those students for whom a slightly adapted curriculum is appropriate and those whose behavioural, social and emotional needs are more likely to be met by full time, off-site alternative provision. In the main the former group of students attend the local further education college for a day each week to follow vocational courses. For the second group, alternative provision often involves attending two providers who meet different aspects of students' needs.
- The college works closely with the local authority which commissions, quality assures and coordinates alternative provision. Systems for safeguarding students and securing health and safety requirements are laid out in detail. Providers say that quality assurance processes, including

those which evaluate the quality of teaching and assessment, are regular and rigorous.

- The college and local authority work in partnership to ensure that alternative provision matches students' personal development needs, abilities and interests. A panel of local authority officers and school representatives meets regularly to consider applications and works with schools to put together suitable personalised programmes for students. Some students spend part of the week at a pupil referral unit and the remainder at an alternative provider. Others attend two providers and some also spend part of the week at a work placement.
- Although students' social, emotional and behavioural needs are paramount, a key criterion in getting the right balance of provision is that students should be able to gain qualifications in English and mathematics at a level matched to their abilities. All provision includes courses on personal, social and emotional development and focuses on the skills required for employment.
- Both students and providers are suitably prepared for the start of a placement, which may begin at any point during the academic year. The college uses a detailed form which is part of the local authority's procedures, to share a range of relevant information about students with providers. All students, sometimes accompanied by parents or carers, visit providers for an initial interview. Some providers also conduct tests to evaluate students' basic skills in English and mathematics. Although providers are well aware of previous difficulties, they are keen to give students the opportunity for a fresh start.
- All providers contact the college and the local authority twice daily to inform them of students' attendance. Where there are difficulties, the local authority's learning mentor provides support in the first instance. Providers are in close touch with the local authority and are confident of prompt support from officers when issues arise. There is appropriate liaison between providers, the local authority and schools to resolve any problems.
- The college endeavours to ensure that students are able to gain GCSEs in English and mathematics, a BTEC in science and a qualification in information and communications technology (ICT). Some students are given intensive tuition and entered early for GCSE examinations to help them secure these qualifications. For others for whom it is more appropriate, courses to enable them to gain qualifications in functional skills are an element of their alternative provision.
- In 2013, all Year 11 students left the college with at least one qualification. All Year 11 alternative provision students gained a GCSE in English with three of the seven students achieving a grade C or above. Six gained a GCSE in mathematics with one achieving a grade C or above.

Two students were awarded a qualification in functional skills in mathematics at entry level 2.

- Students have opportunities linked to their placements to gain recognised vocational qualifications at a range of levels. These can provide a basis for students' next steps as the pathways chosen by the Year 11 alternative provision students who left the college in 2013 show. All but one is pursuing education, employment or training directly linked to the accredited vocational course they followed.
- The college reviews the impact of alternative provision through weekly meetings about the performance of each year group. Students' progress, evident from the regular reviews they participate in and feedback from providers, is considered and where necessary placements are adjusted. The college, local authority and providers are very flexible in trying to meet students' needs as closely as possible. The governing body, via sub-committees dealing with behaviour and safety, the curriculum and finance, receives reports which include those students attending alternative provision.
- The small number of students spoken to were positive about the opportunities provided by the college to pursue vocational training. They were more aware of the demands on, and responsibilities of, employees. Alternative provision had helped one student to identify his career path and recognise the need to improve his punctuality and attendance if he is to pursue this successfully.

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

- ensuring that the college maintains personal contact with students attending alternative provision at regular, agreed intervals.

Yours sincerely

**Jane Austin**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**