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12 December 2013

Mrs M Hunter
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Dear Mrs Hunter

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 19 and 20 November 2013 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, senior leaders, the flexible learning coordinator, groups of students and a governor. I spoke to a few parents by telephone and examined a range of documents. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: Andy Blundell Property Maintenance, Cornwall College Duchy College, Elemental UK (water sports centre), Pendennis Shipyard (Freemans) and The Dell 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

- Leadership and management of alternative provision ensure that it is exceptionally well planned and integrated into the curriculum. Selected students are able to choose a flexible learning option at Key Stage 4 which includes vocational courses at local colleges of further education and/or extended work placements that sometimes lead to apprenticeships.
- The flexible learning option also includes an additional half-day water sports programme for students in Year 10 who are considered most at risk of becoming not engaged in education, employment or training. The programme re-engages them in education through developing skills in learning and working together.

- The school's coordinator for flexible learning provides highly effective support for the students' progress and safety while they are off-site, and is accountable for their progress across the whole curriculum. The coordinator visits the students in their placements every two weeks and telephones the providers to check the students' attendance at each session. Students can contact her at any time.
- Alternative provision is linked well to school work through the NCFE Certificate in Employability Skills which is taken by the students. Students and providers comment in the students' log books, which are monitored by the flexible learning coordinator.
- Students follow a balanced curriculum that leads to nationally recognised qualifications, including BTEC qualifications at college. As alternative education is a curriculum option, students are able to study for GCSEs at school without missing any lessons. They take GCSEs in the core subjects and in subjects that they select from another curriculum are, such as design and technology or humanities. The core subjects include English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, physical education and religious education.
- The school takes great care in selecting and commissioning alternative provision that matches each student's needs, interests and aspirations. As a result, most students go on to study full-time at college and some gain apprenticeships.
- The school makes effective use of the Education Business Partnership (EBP) in selecting appropriate provision. The EBP carries out all the required safeguarding checks on the providers. The school's coordinator is rigorous in checking the health and safety of the provision, including risk assessments carried out by the providers, before the students begin their placements. She also makes sure that students are aware of how to keep safe in the workplace.
- Providers are very well informed about the students' academic levels and any medical, social or behavioural needs prior to the placement. They value the help provided by the coordinator in her regular visits, when she discusses with them strategies for supporting the students.
- The school has very comprehensive systems for monitoring and evaluating the students' progress in alternative provision. They include visits to the provision by the school's coordinator every two weeks which includes checking the students' log books, and reports written by the providers each term.
- Senior leaders evaluate the impact of the provision on the rest of school life each term by monitoring the students' academic progress across subjects, their reading ages, attendance, and any exclusions and

behaviour referrals. The information indicates significant improvements in these areas for most students.

- The school's academic progress tracking system filters information on the flexible learning group in the same way that it does for other identified groups of students. It shows that most students are making at least expected progress and about half the group are making more than expected progress. Where students on BTEC level 1 courses are making more than expected progress, they are moved to level 2 courses.
- In 2013, all fifteen of the Year 11 students in the flexible learning option group attained GCSEs in English language and literature, and in mathematics, and all but one also student attained a BTEC award, which is the equivalent of two GCSEs. Only one student was subsequently not in education, employment or training. The school believes that, without the alternative provision, all the students would have been in danger of becoming so.
- The parents who spoke to me said the provision made all the difference to their child's engagement in education and employment. They praised the support provided by the school's coordinator for them and their children.
- Students enjoy their time at the alternative education placements, particularly as they gain a sense of achievement in the practical activities. They feel they are supported well by the school's coordinator and by the providers and are confident to ask them for help if necessary. They like the fact that they are treated as adults by the providers and say that this helps them to develop a more mature attitude to school. They realise they need qualifications and a willingness to work hard in order to gain employment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- engaging the governors in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of alternative provision.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector