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Mrs K Leaver
Principal
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Dear Mrs Leaver

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 21 and 22 January 2014 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. As well as some discussions with you, during the visit I met with the off-site provision manager, the attendance manager, the learning, pastoral and support officer for Year 11, the finance director and some students. I also visited the following providers that your students attend: The Lighthouse Group, Bethel Community College and the Manchester Alternative Provision Academy.

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 academy's use of alternative provision has decreased markedly over several years. As a consequence of the Principal's determination to secure high-quality work-related provision, an increasing number of vocational courses are delivered on-site. Plans are well underway to extend the range of on-site, pre-apprenticeship vocational options from September 2014. As a result, the central focus of alternative provision is to re-engage a small number of students in education rather than provide opportunities linked to vocational pathways. Providers selected are those approved by the local authority.

- Supporting students' personal development so that they are able to learn well is the main factor considered when selecting a provider. Staff know the providers well and are skilled at placing students appropriately, recognising for instance, when small and informal settings are more suited to a student's needs. All the providers used offer functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics as a minimum.
- Students are carefully prepared before moving to alternative provision. There are good links with parents or carers who are always involved. The academy ensures that providers have a good range of information, not only about students' social, emotional and behavioural needs but also about their academic performance and potential.
- Providers appreciate having an accessible and responsive line of communication with the academy. They are confident of a rapid response should an issue arise and value being able to communicate consistently with the same member of staff. Responsibilities and procedures, for instance regarding a student's absence, are clear. Providers recognise the benefits to students of sustaining links with the academy through the frequent visits of the off-site provision manager.
- Almost all students attending alternative provision do so full time. Where this is not the case, students receive additional support, often from higher level teaching assistants, to make sure they keep up with their classmates. The academy's system of collaborative planning and zoned subject teaching ensures that teachers with subject expertise are on hand to help when needed. The academy is very flexible in its approach to ensuring that Key Stage 4 students, whose behaviour and attitudes allow, have opportunities to come back into school to complete their GCSE courses. Bespoke support is put in place for them, usually for intensive, limited periods.
- All students on alternative provision follow accredited courses in English and mathematics. In 2013, six of the eight Year 11 students gained a GCSE in mathematics, with two achieving a grade C. Three students gained a GCSE in English although none reached a grade C. The academy is beginning to develop effective ways of evaluating the progress students make while attending alternative provision and considering this in the light of nationally expected rates of progress.
- Alternative provision played a significant part in reengaging in learning the Year 11 students who left in 2013. Although at risk of leaving school without a clear post-16 pathway, all but one progressed to education, training or employment. In some instances there is a clear link between the experience gained on alternative provision and students' choice of training.
- Students' progress in the various aspects of their personal development is evaluated regularly. Providers meet with students, their parents or carers and the off-site provision manager to discuss, and then report in writing,

on their progress. Providers' records of students' attendance, punctuality, behaviour and attitudes inform the discussions and help the academy monitor the impact of the provision.

- Formal monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is less well established. A partnership of six local high schools organised a review of alternative provision in the area last year which included evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. However, a follow up is not expected until next year. The Manchester Alternative Provision Academy has its own systems for quality assuring its provision.
- In the main, the students spoken to were positive about attending alternative provision. They appreciate the smaller, less formal settings as well as learning styles which match their individual needs more closely. They recognise that they are making progress both in managing their behaviour and in learning.

Areas for improvement, which the academy has identified and which we discussed, include:

- devising an effective method for evaluating students' academic progress while attending alternative provision and developing common data systems to enable schools and providers to share this information
- introducing more regular, systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in alternative provision.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector