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Mr M Everett
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Dear Mr Everett

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 3 and 4 June 2014 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, your deputy headteachers, members of the support and guidance team, the Chair of Governing Body and a parent governor. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- Norton Radstock College
- The Aspire Academy, Bath
- The Mendip Link Centre – a medical pupil referral unit.

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

- Off-site alternative provision is used flexibly as part of the school's very supportive and broad-ranging inclusion programme. The support and guidance team, including advisors for each year group, carefully monitors students' behaviour, attendance, progress, and their emotional and social well-being. Governors are also involved in this monitoring process. Through discussion with the student, parents and staff, a student experiencing difficulties may join support groups and activities, and work to a modified curriculum. The few students who do not engage

successfully with the school's own provision, mainly for behavioural, emotional, social or medical reasons, are offered off-site provision.

- The nature and duration of the placements are tailored to students' interests and needs. For example the foundation programme at Norton Radstock College provides 'tasters' of occupational areas, and then allows students to successfully make progress to higher levels in areas in which they choose to specialise. The academic GCSE programme at the Mendip Link Centre is appropriate to the student's need to successfully complete GCSE programmes started at school.
- Alternative provision is commissioned by the school after thorough discussion of each student's case at the area behaviour panel of local schools which meets fortnightly. Through such regular and highly cooperative engagement with other schools and providers, the school has been successful in keeping permanent exclusions well below average. The local authority has delegated funding for this work to schools, although it continues to commission places for students at the Aspire Academy.
- Provision is commissioned from well-established local providers. Provision seen on this inspection was safe in accommodation that was generally fit for purpose, and of a very high standard in many vocational areas at Norton Radstock College. Other providers are in the process of moving to new premises to expand and address any shortcomings in teaching and learning spaces.
- The quality of the information given to the providers is excellent, and supports them very well in making appropriate provision for the students. Norton Radstock College uses this information to provide all teaching and support staff with detailed support plans identifying strategies to be used to support the students.
- Providers speak very favourably of the instant response from the school in providing them with further information that might be requested, for example on students' previous work at school.
- The curriculum for students following alternative provision is adjusted to meet each student's changing needs and circumstances. The large majority of students, nearly all in Year 11, are now on full-time placements; provision has been increased over time for some of these students because it has been more successful than time in school. Where students are on two- or three-day placements, their school curriculum is adapted to focus on English and mathematics and options where these fit. Teaching is sometimes in mainstream classes, or often by teachers or teaching assistants in 'The House' inclusion facility or small-group working.
- In all cases, at school or on placements, students follow GCSE or functional skills programmes in English and mathematics, or a mix of both. In 2012/13, all 14 of the Year 11 students on alternative provision gained GCSE accreditation in English and mathematics. Half of these students

gained grade C or above in mathematics, and one did so in English. Nearly half made progress at the nationally expected rate in mathematics, though only a fifth did so in English. The prior attainment of the current cohort of 11 students is much lower, but their progress in English and mathematics is well below that expected. Providers do not in all cases set clear enough targets for students' achievement in English and mathematics or track progress against these. The Aspire Academy by contrast has introduced a detailed tracking system which allows the school and the provider to identify and act to address student underachievement.

- Most students make strong improvements in their attendance and behaviour through their alternative placements. As a result of their positive re-engagement in education and success in attaining qualifications from their courses, nearly all are successful in securing places in post-16 education, employment or training. Students often move into post-16 places in occupational areas linked to their alternative provision, and the 2012/13 cohort showed very clear progression in this respect.
- The school keeps provision under review, particularly by tracking behaviour and attendance information from providers and through discussions at behaviour panels. However, the reports it, and parents, receive from providers vary widely in their frequency and detail. School staff and leaders visit providers to set up placements and address specific concerns, but few visits are made to check on the quality of provision and the student's ongoing progress.
- Students have very positive views of alternative provision. Those at college, for example, identify the benefits of working in a 'more adult' environment and developing skills they find useful and relevant to their futures.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' progress in English and mathematics, and ensuring that providers and the school track this progress regularly against clear targets
- receiving more regular, detailed reports from providers on students' progress and personal development
- ensuring that school staff visit providers more frequently to check on the quality of provision and students' progress
- clarifying responsibilities between school and provider for organising and monitoring work placements.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector