

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



5 November 2014

Dr H Holman
Headteacher
Orchard School Bristol
Filton Road
Horfield
Bristol
BS7 0XZ

Dear Dr Holman

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 3–4 November 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, your deputy headteacher in charge of pastoral support, the special educational needs and learning support coordinator, and the school's data administrator. At the school I met with representatives of a number of providers: the St Matthias Pupil Referral Unit, Education 1st, and Urban Pursuit. I held a telephone discussion with the headteacher of the Bristol Hospital Education Service. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend:

- The Wheels Project, Brislington
- Kidsco, The Heart Lodge, Henbury
- KTS Training, Southmead

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 has a very good understanding of the nature and range of alternative provision available in the area, gleaned from a local authority catalogue of recommended provision, and from its extensive involvement in working with a range of agencies that support of vulnerable young people.
- The local authority has retained a valuable role in monitoring the quality and safety of a number of providers through the checks it makes in a three-year certification and approval process. The recent appointment of a virtual headteacher for alternative provision is aimed at strengthening the oversight of the quality of provision.
- Pastoral leaders select the type of alternative provision carefully to match the behavioural, social and emotional needs of each student. Fortnightly meetings of the Student Referral Panel of pastoral leaders and heads of house consider information about each student's attitudes, behaviour and attendance. It recommends either internal or external programmes of support and keeps these programmes under review, primarily through indicators of student and parent engagement. The school is increasingly using early interventions in Years 7 and 8, which sometimes include off-site alternative provision placements with some early success, as a means of pre-empting later problems of disengagement.
- Leaders regularly consult external support agencies on the use of alternative provision, including through termly meetings of the multi-agency panel. A number of students are receiving intensive full-time support through the Hospital Education Service.
- The providers visited offered accommodation that was safe and mostly fit for purpose. Minor shortcomings were linked to the refurbishment of new premises and were being addressed. The Wheels Project offered workshop facilities of a particularly high quality to engage a small group of students for up to a day a week on exciting automotive engineering and driving projects.
- The school gives providers comprehensive information about students' behavioural, social and emotional background, including relevant child protection information. This ensures that providers are well-prepared to deal with the specific needs of pupils and shape provision accordingly. Urban Pursuits has used this information to particularly good effect to set short-term personal development targets for students on temporary full-time placements. The quality of information requested by providers about students' academic backgrounds, however, is often far less detailed. In some cases this makes it difficult to ensure that provision is set at the right level to build on what students can already do.

- Providers feel well supported by the school. They value the ready response to queries or concerns by key staff.
- The impact of alternative provision on other elements of a student's curriculum varies widely depending on the nature, extent and duration of that provision. For students on full-time provision, the breadth and balance of the curriculum varies by provider, and some narrowly-focused provision is on offer. Students in Year 11 on half- or one-day programmes receive catch-up sessions for the lessons they missed in mathematics and English, and they value the one-to-one support this brings. This support is not systematically provided, however, for students in a similar situation in other year groups, and some find catch-up difficult.
- Students' attainment at GCSE in English and mathematics in 2013/14 varied widely by subject. All seven students gained a GCSE in English, including two at grade C. However, a high proportion of students were ungraded in mathematics and also did not gain an alternative qualification in the subject. All alternative provision students in mathematics made less progress than expected of students nationally. Progress was better in English, although just two students made the progress expected.
- Academic progress remains lower than expected for the large majority of students currently on alternative provision. The school's evaluation of the impact of alternative provision focuses primarily on a thorough review of engagement indicators with providers, centred on attitudes, attendance and behaviour. Less prominence is given to measurements of improvements in their progress in English and mathematics.
- Not all placements - especially those of a short-term nature for younger pupils - lead to specific vocational accreditation. Full-time placements offer mainly either GCSE or functional and work skills accreditation. The school has strong links with Learning Partnership West to supply intensive careers advice and information. As a result, nearly all students move into further education, mainly at Level 1 or Level 2 reflecting their prior academic record.
- School leaders evaluate the success of alternative provision by regular assessments of student and parental engagement. These assessments are informed by regular and often very precise reports on students' attitudes and personal development from providers. However, school staff do not regularly or systematically visit each placement to check on provision and the student's well-being.
- Students have overwhelmingly positive views about their alternative provision placements. Those on part-time placements in particular say that their general behaviour and attendance has improved because they enjoy the activities so much and do not want to lose them. They also comment favourably on the promotion of teamwork and respect for others. Those

on full-time placements say that they prefer the smaller-group working with more focused one-to-one support and guidance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the academic progress of students in English and especially mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that students who miss lessons while attending alternative provision are given effective support to catch up
 - ensuring that providers are given detailed information on students' prior attainment and academic background to ensure that they can work at levels matched to their ability
 - monitoring students' academic progress with the same degree of rigour as is given to the students' engagement and behaviour.

- strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of alternative provision by:
 - increasing the regularity of visits to providers by school staff to check on students' well-being and progress, and on the quality of provision
 - systematically reporting to the governing body on the cost-effectiveness of alternative provision.

My concerns about the registration status of one of the providers you are using have been reported to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector