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Mr A Griffin
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Dear Mr Griffin

Ofsted 2014 15 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 16-17 March 2015 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the vice-principal for teaching and learning and an assistant principal. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Manchester Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), Route 43; Manchester Young Lives, Wythenshawe; Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy; Brighter Futures.

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

- Leaders' consideration of the specific needs of students when selecting suitable alternative provisions is a strength of the school's work. Although the proportion of students accessing alternative provision is low, the school uses seven providers to ensure that all students benefit from a placement which is bespoke and above all safe.
- The safeguarding of all students is a high priority for leaders when commissioning alternative provision. Although leaders take into account the likelihood of academic progress when identifying suitable alternative provision, they also study location and the nature of other young people

already on roll. Consequently, leaders' actions to meet the specific safeguarding needs of this group of students are effective.

- Leaders use their partnership with Manchester PRU and therefore the local authority effectively to commission a suitable range of alternative provision which meets students' academic as well as personal needs. The academy's portfolio of providers includes independent providers, registered and non-registered providers and a proportion that are led, managed and monitored by Manchester PRU. As a result of this effective selection of providers, along with additional support given by academy leaders, for example the supply of subject-specific work for students, the vast majority of students progress appropriately based on their starting points.
- Leaders' own records show that they monitor students' academic progress well. My discussions with leaders also show that they use their evaluation of students' progress to make informed and accurate decisions when considering the appropriateness of students' placements. Leaders' have, quite rightly, identified that their judgements about the outcomes of this group of students would be strengthened by being precise about students' gains in their personal, behaviour, social and emotional development.
- I visited the premises of four providers. The type of building ranged from a small mainstream school to a former industrial unit. All gave an environment which reflected adequately the main purpose of the alternative provision. Each of the provisions has more than one learning area and also provides students with a quiet space should they choose to work on their own. Leaders are aware that they need to put monitoring systems in place to ensure they are confident that the quality of premises experienced by students contributes effectively to preparing them well for their next steps.
- My scrutiny of students' referral information, along with my discussions with providers, shows that on the whole the academy ensures appropriately detailed information supports providers in supporting the students. The academy's use of a risk assessment for each student is a particular strength of the referral system. Providers I spoke to felt that the additional detail given in the risk assessment enabled them to plan effectively for the specific needs of students. Leaders are aware however, that when circumstances dictate placements are made at short notice, they do not always provide sufficiently detailed information about the specific needs of students.
- All of the providers spoken to feel that they are well supported by the academy. Academy leaders make frequent visits to providers' premises; they meet with students and check their work. Robust systems are in place by which the providers are able to contact the academy in order to raise concerns, particularly about the welfare of students. All of the providers feel that academy leaders act swiftly on their requests for support. In the level of support they offer, academy leaders make no

distinction between provisions commissioned directly and those commissioned and managed by the PRU. This is strong practice and ensures all students are treated equally regardless of the alternative provision they attend.

- The academy places a suitable emphasis on students' development of their basic skills when commissioning alternative provision. Consequently, each placement supports students working towards qualifications in English and mathematics at an appropriate level. The proportion of Year 11 students who attended alternative provision last year attaining a pass grade at GCSE level in English and or mathematics was low. However, the school's own data show that five out of seven current Year 11 students are on target to attain a pass grade at GCSE in both English and mathematics this year. Taking account of starting points when students began attending alternative provision this is strong progress and a marked improvement compared to the previous year.
- Despite the low academic attainment of last year's Year 11 students, the school's own data show that none of these students are identified as NEET (not in education, employment or training). Furthermore, discussions with leaders show that the large majority of this group of students, who followed a vocational qualification, moved on to a course or job related to their alternative placement. Although this is evidence of strong outcomes for this group of students, the school's own data is not detailed enough to judge if these post-school courses or jobs represent effective progress.
- The students spoken to were wholeheartedly positive about their experience of alternative provision. While one student felt that he had not been consulted adequately about his placement, he could now see the benefits of working within a small group. This student felt that he is now making rapid progress, something that he would not have achieved in the academy, and is intending to use alternative provision as a springboard to a Level 3 course next year.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- using the wealth of information the academy holds about students' academic, personal, social and behaviour development to identify what appropriate outcomes and therefore good progress will look like for each student who attends alternative provision
- ensuring that all providers are clear about the academy's safeguarding expectations, policy and procedures and that providers are suitably trained in the specific safeguarding concerns experienced by students from Manchester Academy
- ensuring that all providers, and therefore students, benefit from frequent high quality feedback to support and promote improvements in provision.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector