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Mr R Hughes
Principal
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Dear Mr Hughes

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 March 2014 to look at the academy's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the vice-principal, the deputy special educational needs coordinator, the work-related learning coordinator, and four students who attend alternative provision. I examined a range of documents including students' progress records. I visited the following off-site providers that your students attend: Phoenix U16; Groundworks West Midlands; Sporting Stars 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

- Senior leaders monitor the quality of off-site alternative provision rigorously to ensure that students are safe and well-supported off-site. Only a small number of providers meet the academy's high standards; the number of registered providers currently used has reduced from twelve to three. Providers receive clear and constructive feedback about their strengths and areas for development. The impact on improving off-site provision is evident. Where standards are not met, the academy makes alternative arrangements for students quickly. Examples included expectations of behaviour and truancy that the academy felt were too low when students were attending the off-site provision.

- The monitoring of students' progress off-site is exemplary. Records of students' attendance, punctuality and performance are set alongside their school record to ensure that gains are evident. From the start, the academy makes clear to providers, students, parents and carers the purpose of using off-site alternative provision. The very best providers ensure that students complement teachers' monitoring by reflecting deeply and self-critically on their starting points and on the progress they make. This helps students to take responsibility.
- Off-site alternative provision is used effectively to improve students' employability; over the past two years only one student left the academy without employment, further education or training. Providers add to the range of careers advice given to students at the academy. Some participate in options and careers events for students and their parents and carers by drawing on their specialist expertise. The academy careers adviser visits students while working off-site. Students' destinations after leaving the academy inform the academy's self-evaluation.
- Alternative provision is an integral part of the academy's focus on inclusion. This includes work with a special school that shares the same site, local secondary schools that work collaboratively to support vulnerable students, and the development of the 'respect' inclusion centre at the academy. When students access off-site alternative provision a wide range of strategies have already been used. As a consequence, the academy gives providers a good range of helpful information.
- Off-site alternative provision is a turning point in improving behaviour, punctuality and attendance for the students taking part. Students interviewed reported improvements in their relationships with adults and other students, and their attitudes towards work. The evidence is particularly strong where students regularly review their own progress and development, often from very self-critical starting points. Systematic checking of attendance, a weekly visit by their learning mentor at the academy, regular reviews and reports to parents and carers and to the governing body help to keep students on track.
- The academy gives importance to students' achievement in English and mathematics when arranging timetables that incorporate off-site provision. As a consequence, all Year 11 students using off-site provision in 2013 attained a GCSE grade in English and mathematics. Providers are challenged about the quality of provision with regard to literacy, mathematics and communication. All accommodation used includes computer resources and work surfaces suited to academic study.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- broadening the range of information and data shared with providers, particularly where links can be made between non-core subjects taken in Year 7 to 9 at the academy and the options taken off-site

- using the information gathered through the academy's monitoring process to share and spread best practice, for example in developing student self-review and self-management
- retaining the focus on high quality provision while widening the range of specialist options available, for example skills linked to the ceramics industry locally.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector