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Mrs G Dunlop
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dunlop

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 9 and 10 June 2014 to look at the pupil referral unit's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the programme manager for alternative provision, the special educational needs coordinator and the attendance officer. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Outdoor Academy, Reading YMCA and TLG (The Lighthouse Group Centre).

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 pupil referral unit's work

- The pupil referral unit commissions alternative provision for some of its students from external providers that they know well and have used most of them for a long time. Providers are commissioned to support students in transferring successfully back to mainstream schools, to increase their time on-site at the unit or to post-16 courses.
- The local authority does not work directly with the unit to commission alternative provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded or for those with medical needs. However, having identified a group of students with statements of special educational need within the local

authority that do not have a school place, the unit has recently agreed, in partnership with the local authority, to make sure that these students have alternative, full-time individual learning programmes.

- Arrangements to safeguard students on alternative provision are well-thought through and carefully followed by the providers. Providers are suitably trained in child protection. They are very aware about the potential vulnerabilities of students that come to them. Procedures to follow if students fail to arrive at the arranged time or if staff have concerns about students' welfare are very clearly understood.
- Students spoken to during this visit say that they develop confidence and enjoy the activities and courses. They value the frequent contact with staff from the unit.
- Providers visited value the support of staff from the unit. Contact is frequent and staff are readily available to discuss any concerns. However, staff do not formally check on the quality of teaching or the curriculum when they visit.
- Accommodation visited is well suited for the activities available, with some high quality resources for vocational studies.
- Last year, all Year 11 students on alternative provision achieved an English and mathematics qualification. Three of the six students gained GCSEs in English and mathematics. For most students, this represents at least expected progress from their starting points. There is some good progress in mathematics. All students went on to further education or employment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- having a written policy for alternative provision, with clear procedures and practices for the identification of students, commissioning arrangements, and the monitoring and evaluating of the quality of the provision
- formally monitoring the quality of teaching and the curriculum at providers who offer alternative vocational activities
- tracking the students on alternative provision as a separate group, so that the impact of their experiences is evaluated thoroughly.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector