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Miss M Duncan
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Duncan

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 12–13 May 2015 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you, three assistant headteachers, the work-related learning/alternative provision team, the school's bursar and the alternative provision commissioner from the local authority. I also met groups of students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Footsteps Academy and the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London.

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

- There are two strands to the use of alternative provision at Northumberland Park. Some students choose to attend college for one morning or afternoon each week to study a vocational course as part of their option choices for Key Stage 4. Currently, these students are working towards City and Guilds qualifications in hair and beauty and construction. They are accompanied to college by at least one member of staff and an additional teaching assistant to support students with special educational needs as required

- A small number of students attend alternative providers on a full-time basis. These students are typically those at risk of exclusion or who have become disaffected with learning and school. The main purpose is to support the students to deal with the difficulties they have and to help them complete their studies. Where possible, students return to Northumberland Park when they are ready.
- You only use providers that are registered and that are quality assured by the local authority. The local authority's checks include a thorough scrutiny of arrangements for protecting students and keeping them safe. In addition, you double check that all staff who have contact with your students have been properly vetted.
- You make sure that all students attending alternative provision have the chance to study English and mathematics at a level that is appropriate for their prior attainment. Most students continue to work towards GCSEs. You expect that all students will end Year 11 with qualifications of some kind. Both Footsteps Academy and the College also offer programmes that support the development of students' personal and social skills and lead to accreditation.
- Both of the sites visited are suitable for the types of activities offered there.
- Both providers have their own detailed application forms that ensure they receive all of the information they need about individual students before they start. Parents are fully involved in discussions about placements and are expected to visit before a full-time place is offered. Information about students' particular circumstances is shared as appropriate. Both providers also carry out their own risk assessments and seek information about the best ways of managing inappropriate behaviour.
- Providers said that they feel well supported and that lines of communication are clear. They appreciated working in partnership with your staff to decide on the next steps following any instances of poor behaviour, for example.
- Students attending alternative provision for half a day do not miss out on important subjects while they are out.
- All but one of the Year 11 students who completed their full-time placement last year gained at least one qualification at GCSE or entry level. Four gained a GCSE pass in mathematics and one did so in English. Others passed at entry level.

- Students who settle in to their placements typically start to catch up on where they would be expected to be, because their behaviour, attitudes and attendance improve. Few make the academic progress that is expected from the age of eleven. However, your staff go to great lengths to make sure that the students continue in education or training once they leave. All but one progressed on to college in September last year, and you know, because it is regularly checked, that they are all still there.
- Academic outcomes for this year's Year 11 students are expected to be better than last year's results. Cohorts differ in their needs and difficulties from year to year, so direct comparisons are not able to be made.
- Your staff put a good deal of effort into making sure that the subjects students are studying and the choices they make are the right ones for their circumstances, abilities and aspirations, and that they have the opportunity to progress. Students are given detailed advice on careers, are helped to complete application forms, given guidance on interview skills and are shown how to travel to college, for example. One student attending alternative provision was delighted to have made four applications and to have received four offers from different colleges. In recent years it has only been exceptional circumstances that have prevented any student from going on into education, training or employment after they leave Northumberland Park.
- You receive regular updates from providers about students' academic progress. Footsteps Academy also provides information about students' attitudes to learning and other personal attributes. Neither provider gives information in such a way to help you see trends or gauge progress in personal and social development, however.
- Your staff make regular and frequent visits to providers, including unannounced drop-in visits. The visits do not include formal observations of teaching and learning, but include discussions with staff and students about how well placements are going. The local authority works in partnership with other local authorities and schools to carry out inspections. Both providers are also subject to inspections by Ofsted.
- The governing body regularly discusses aspects of alternative provision in meetings.
- The students held largely positive views about their experiences of alternative provision. Those at college were fully engaged and interested during the lesson that I observed. Students who had been at alternative provision and had returned to Northumberland Park understood fully the reasons for the placement, but were glad to be back in mainstream school. However, they knew that they had benefited from their time away. Students currently at full-time alternative provision appreciated the time

they have to talk about what is troubling them and to work out ways forward, as well as the personalised attention they have in lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- summarising and collating all of the information you are given about students' progress in one document
- considering asking providers to supplement the information they provide to include tracking of students' progress in their personal and social development. This would enable the governing body to judge the impact of alternative provision as a whole on outcomes for students
- considering ways of supporting less experienced providers to improve their practice, for example, in how they set targets for students' achievement and the most effective ways of marking students' work.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector