

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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

19 November 2014

Ms Emma Reynolds
Headteacher
The Bulmershe School
Chequers Way
Woodley
Reading
Berkshire
RG5 3EL

Dear Ms Reynolds

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 17 – 18 November 2014 to look at the school's use of alternative provision. During the visit I met with you and the two deputy headteachers who co-ordinate the provision. I also met students and visited the following providers that your students attend: Aspire, Thrive and Body Rocks.

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 recently reviewed its use of alternative educational provision. As a result, it employs a range of successful strategies and provides courses which meet the needs of almost all students on the school site. Consequently, only a very small proportion of students require arrangements that include the use of alternative educational provision.
- Alternative provision is chosen carefully to meet the individual needs and interests of students. Students are prepared well for choosing alternative provision, usually through visits and 'taster' sessions. Providers get a suitable range of information to help them in supporting the students.

Although informal discussions take place, the school does not share written information outlining its child protection policies and procedures.

- The alternative provision offers a pleasant and safe environment. Staff are highly skilled and have a good understanding of students' individual needs. The school conducts informal checks on the suitability of the staff and accommodation but does not always keep a full written record of these checks.
- Providers report that any problems that might arise can be resolved quickly with the school. They send the school regular reports on students' general progress, employability and personal skills and academic achievement. These reports are then included in the school's own report to parents and carers.
- Attendance at alternative providers is organised flexibly around the individual needs of students. Students who attend alternative provision part-time follow a balanced curriculum which includes mathematics, English, science and vocational courses. Wherever possible, the school provides opportunities for skills learned at the off-site provision to be developed further in school. The school is particularly successful at ensuring students who have learning difficulties receive a challenging and relevant range of subjects. A small number of students attend alternative providers full-time and it is unclear whether they receive sufficient taught time in the week.
- The school monitors thoroughly the progress of students who attend alternative provision as a discrete group in order to evaluate the overall impact of provision. Staff visit most of the off-site provision at least once each term to make a general check on the quality of learning. However, there is inconsistency in the monitoring of teaching and learning in the different types of provision.
- The number of students leaving school at the end of 2014 who had used alternative educational provision was quite small. Just over half gained five GCSE passes. Almost all gained a pass in English with about a third gaining grade C or above. Just under half gained a pass in mathematics with one at a grade C or above, while others gained a pass in functional skills. All students had been underachieving previously. School information shows that the large majority of students made expected or better progress since attending alternative provision.
- Students' personal, social and employability skills are promoted well by the alternative providers. Each year, several of those who leave school start training linked to the courses studied at their alternative educational placement.
- Students are very positive about their experiences at the off-site provision. They appreciate the skill and dedication of the staff in helping them cope with personal difficulties. Students feel they have grown in confidence and

become more mature since attending off-site provision. As one past student commented, 'I grew up in that year.'

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening safeguarding procedures by giving providers written copies of the school's policies and by keeping more detailed records of checks made on the suitability of off-site providers
- monitoring more systematically the quality of teaching and learning at off-site provision
- checking that all students attending alternative educational provision receive sufficient taught time in the school week.

My concern about the registration status of one of the providers you have used has been reported to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

**Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector**