

Dear Parents/Carers,

As you know, we were visited by a team of Ofsted inspectors for a full 2-day inspection on 14th and 15th September. The inspection team, led by Jim McGrath, visited many lessons, talked to pupils, staff and parents, scrutinised pupil work, examined achievement data, plans for improvement and met with leaders and governors to evaluate a range of evidence about the academy's performance.

The full report will be published by Ofsted today. The full report follows this letter and some key points are highlighted below.

Leadership of the academy including governance

- The Headteacher, governors and other leaders are ambitious for the pupils. They show unwavering commitment to improving the quality of teaching, pupils' outcomes and aspects of leadership.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate and deep understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have taken very effective action to improve pupils' outcomes.
- Staff and pupils are positive about leaders, recognising and welcoming the challenge they bring in raising standards. Staff morale is high and pupils are proud of their school.
- Discussions with parents and an analysis of parental questionnaires indicate that parents are very positive about leadership in the school.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum that is well matched to pupils' prior learning, future goals and current learning needs. A broad range of courses are studied throughout the school, with a good emphasis on English and mathematics.

Teaching, learning and assessment

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Teachers plan interesting work for pupils and, when possible, link the work to real-life experiences. This leads to good engagement with pupils being keen to learn and presenting their work well.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This is helping pupils to make good progress.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge supports pupils well across a wide range of subjects.
- Teachers use good questioning skills to involve pupils in thinking deeply about what is being learned.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is accurate.

Pupil outcomes

- Across the school, most pupils are making good progress.
- Outcomes in English are outstanding and attainment in art has been well above average.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages has improved over time because teaching and leadership are now good across a wide range of subjects.
- The most able pupils have been challenged well by the work set for them and they attain at least as well as similar pupils nationally by the end of key stage 4.
- Least able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have bespoke support to catch up in English and mathematics so they can access all the wider subjects on offer. They are making good progress across the school. This is a good example of the school's commitment to equality of opportunity for all.
- Pupils are making good progress in reading.
- Pupils in key stage 1 use their phonics skills well to read and reading is developing well by the end of Year 2.

Pupil personal development and behaviour

- The school's work to promote personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils take great pride in their work. Pupils are very smart in their uniform and wear it with pride.
- Many pupils take on leadership roles, contributing impressively to the work of the school.

...where hearts and minds connect

The Halifax Academy, Gibbet Street, Halifax, West Yorkshire, HX2 0BA

Secondary T: 01422 301080 E: admin@thehalifaxacademy.org www.thehalifaxacademy-secondary.org

Primary T: 01422 430480 E: primary@thehalifaxacademy.org www.thehalifaxacademy-primary.org

- Pupils have a 'guarantee' which supports them in aspirational activities. In the previous year, some pupils climbed Ben Nevis and Mount Snowdon.
- Pupils are extremely confident and participate in assemblies using their good presentation and language skills.
- Pupils are exceptionally clear about the school's values and what is expected of them.
- High-quality careers information, advice and guidance provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to be well prepared for future learning and work.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils, parents and staff agree. Pupils are pleasant, polite and well mannered.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and socialise well together both in the primary and secondary buildings. In class, behaviour is good. Pupils cooperate well with each other, their teachers and other adults. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good and they are keen to learn. Good relationships and mutual respect exist between pupils and adults.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding is effective. All pupils spoken with said they are safe in school. Pupils have an extremely clear understanding of how to stay safe, including safe use of the internet. They told inspectors that bullying is rare and should it occur they were confident the school deals with it swiftly.
- Leaders have a sharp focus on safeguarding children. Staff are well trained, knowledgeable and vigilant about safeguarding matters. They exhibit clearly the school's commitment to keeping children safe, particularly the most vulnerable children.

Early years provision

- In the past three years, attainment at the end of Reception has been rising.
- Children's work, from the last school year, shows that good progress was made. Disadvantaged children make good progress as teachers plan well for their needs.
- The curriculum has provided a range of exciting and challenging experiences tailored to children's interests. This supports children's good progress.
- Children's good personal development and welfare is supported well by a range of additional activities.
- Leaders have made sure there is good engagement with parents. This ensures that children are well prepared for school and any additional needs are identified at an early stage.
- All the appropriate welfare and safeguarding requirements are met in the provision.

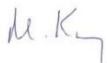
Overall, the inspection team concluded that The Halifax Academy is a good school. I would like to thank pupils, staff, parents and governors who work together tirelessly to make the academy successful. Feedback to inspectors from all stakeholders was unanimously positive about our work. Our staff and governors care passionately about improving the life chances of our young people and are making a real difference in service to your children and our community.

Due to the timing of the inspection, 2017 GCSE results couldn't be included in the Ofsted report because national comparators were not available. This information has since been published to schools and I am very pleased to share that the performance of the class of 2017 was outstanding and progress across their best 8 qualifications, including English and Maths (Progress 8), is in line with outstanding schools nationally. More detail will follow in a special edition of our Connect newsletter.

As highlighted in the report, leaders and governors have a deep understanding of areas for improvement. Parents should have confidence that leaders are already improving the areas identified in the report. The Halifax Academy is a good academy, soon to be outstanding.

Thank you for your continued support.

With my very best wishes,



Mick Kay
Headteacher

...where hearts and minds connect

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The Halifax Academy

Gibbet Street, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX2 0BA

Inspection dates

14–15 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and governors have a very clear and accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Staff are clear about leaders' ambitions and support them very well.
- Systems for checking teachers' performance are comprehensive. Wide-ranging professional development and support for staff have resulted in good leadership and good teaching.
- Teachers plan interesting work and have high expectations of pupils. Questioning is used well to probe pupils' understanding and provide additional challenge.
- Systems to keep pupils and children safe are exceptionally well organised. Staff and pupils are very clear about who they should report any concerns to.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding and their behaviour is good. Pupils are keen to take on posts of responsibility and fulfil their duties impressively.
- Sophisticated systems for tracking pupils' performance are used skilfully by leaders. Pupils who might be falling behind are identified and supported to improve.
- The additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used very effectively to help them catch up.
- The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop their reading, writing and speaking skills in many subjects.
- Overall, outcomes are good. Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 make good progress in a wide range of subjects, including mathematics. Pupils make outstanding progress in English.
- Children in early years have exciting and challenging experiences planned for them. As a result, they make good progress.
- Subject leaders are not ensuring the school's assessment policy is used consistently well.
- The quality of pupils' writing is not checked well enough across a range of subjects.
- In key stage 1, the quality of teaching has been inconsistent over time in writing and especially in mathematics. Progress in these subjects requires improvement.
- In key stage 1, there are too many pupils regularly absent from school.
- Occasionally, teachers do not adjust work set to challenge the most able pupils.
- Parents, staff and pupils are very positive about the work of the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching to strengthen pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - classwork is adjusted when necessary to offer greater challenge, particularly for the most able
 - teachers make sure the quality of pupils' writing is of the highest standard
 - pupils' misconceptions are swiftly addressed to increase their progress.
- Improve the quality of education in key stage 1, by:
 - quickly increasing progress in mathematics so that attainment is at least average
 - setting work, especially in mathematics, that matches the needs and abilities of pupils
 - increasing the proportion of pupils who attain greater depth in writing so it is at least average
 - decreasing the numbers of pupils who are regularly absent from school.
- Increase the impact of leaders and managers by making sure that:
 - subject leaders ensure that the school's assessment policy is used consistently well by staff
 - the quality of teaching in key stage 1 is consistently good.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, governors and other leaders are ambitious for the pupils. Since the opening of the academy, they have had an unwavering commitment to improving the quality of teaching, pupils' outcomes and aspects of leadership. Consequently, all are good and the overall effectiveness of the school is good.
- Staff and pupils are positive about leaders, recognising and welcoming the challenge they bring in raising standards. Staff morale is high and pupils are proud of their school.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate and deep understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have taken very effective action to improve pupils' outcomes. For example, they identified that least-able pupils in mathematics were not making enough progress by the end of key stage 4 and they have remedied this. Leaders track pupils' progress exceptionally well using a wide range of information. Swift action is taken to help pupils catch up should they be falling behind.
- The quality of teaching is checked regularly using a wide range of information. Systems for checking the performance of staff are thorough and linked to staff's professional development. Each week, there are four hours of professional development activity for all staff. Coaching for improvement, sharing of best practice among staff and educational research are well established. As a result, teaching is good overall. Leaders have tackled weaker teaching in the primary phase and secured improvements. However, more has to be done to secure good teaching and good progress for pupils throughout key stage 1.
- Recently qualified and newly qualified teachers are given good support to help them develop good teaching skills. The school supports initial teacher education and has, over time, used this work as a recruitment strategy to employ new teachers.
- Improving middle leadership has been a priority in recent years. Middle leaders, including subject leaders, speak enthusiastically about the support and training they have received. Middle leaders are playing their part well. However, subject leaders have not checked thoroughly that staff are using the school's assessment system consistently well to spot pupils' misconceptions.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum that is well matched to pupils' prior learning, future goals and current learning needs. A broad range of courses are studied throughout the school, with a good emphasis on English and mathematics. Least-able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have bespoke support to catch up in English and mathematics so they can access all the wider subjects on offer. The additional government funds for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and Year 7 catch-up are well spent.
- The primary school physical education and sports funding is used well. For example, it has been used to provide good-quality sports equipment for pupils and specialist coaching in gymnastics and dance to increase teachers' skills in these sports.

- The curriculum makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development and welfare. Pupils' wider development needs are met through a carefully planned 'Hearts and Minds curriculum'. This develops pupils' speaking and presentation skills as well as giving them an excellent understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is progressing very well. Throughout the school, pupils are clear about what is expected of them and socialise well together. They have time each day to reflect on what is happening in the world and a good understanding of cultural diversity.
- Parents participate well in family activities in the primary phase, which helps to boost partnerships with the community. Discussions with parents and an analysis of parental questionnaires, submitted by the school, indicate that parents are very positive about leadership in the school.
- External support is used wisely to check the leaders' judgements and to provide support for improvement.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a good range of skills, including expertise in education and safeguarding. They know the school well because they expect and receive high-quality information from leaders. They check leaders' views on the performance of the school using independent reviews. Governors are clear about the strengths and key priorities for improving the school. They have a clear understanding of the performance of the school in comparison to other schools nationally.
- Governors hold leaders to account for the performance of the school. They review leaders' performance as well as that of teachers and link their pay to performance. They challenge leaders when necessary. Governors have a good understanding of the performance of all aspects of the school. For example, they could speak confidently about the performance of the various departments and the key stages.
- Governors are clear about the impact of the additional finances for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities as well as the sports funding and Year 7 catch-up funding. Governors take a strategic overview of the school, linking their actions to their high aspirations for the pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safeguarding records are of high quality. They exhibit clearly the school's commitment to keeping children safe, particularly the most vulnerable children. Strong links with parents and external agencies are evident. School leaders are tenacious in making sure safeguarding issues are dealt with swiftly.
- Leaders have had a sharp focus on safeguarding children. Staff are well trained, knowledgeable and vigilant about safeguarding matters. The school's safeguarding team checks staff's knowledge regularly and updates them when appropriate. Staff and pupils know what to do should they have any concern relating to safeguarding matters. There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

- Governors have expertise in safeguarding and have made sure staff are fit to work with children and the school fulfils all statutory requirements for keeping children safe in education.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Overall, the quality of teaching is good. In key stages 3 and 4, teaching is consistently good and is stronger than in key stage 1. Over time, in key stage 1 there has been inconsistent teaching although there are signs that this is improving.
- The headteacher's relentless focus on checking teaching and providing very effective training for staff has led to the quality of teaching being good overall.
- Teachers plan interesting work for pupils and, when possible, link the work to real-life experiences. This leads to good engagement with pupils being keen to learn and presenting their work well. Teachers' good subject knowledge supports pupils well across a wide range of subjects.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This is helping pupils to make good progress. Usually, work set is challenging and pupils respond well by persisting with challenging tasks and developing good knowledge, skills and understanding in their subjects. However, pupils' work in key stage 1 is not well matched to their abilities, especially in mathematics, and this slows pupils' progress.
- Teachers use good questioning skills to involve pupils in thinking deeply about what is being learned. They give pupils time to respond fully and use pupils' responses to strengthen the understanding of others.
- Pupils' work is usually checked well in class and adjusted, when necessary, to offer additional challenge or support. However, there are times when work for the most able pupils is too easy and this is not spotted quickly enough to challenge them to make good progress. There are many good opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across a wide range of subjects. However, the quality of pupils' responses is not checked well enough to make sure that English grammar, punctuation and spelling is accurate.
- Overall, teachers' assessment of pupils' work is accurate. Usually, misconceptions are picked up in pupils' work and resolved. However, the school's assessment policy to check pupils' work is not applied consistently well across subjects. There are times when teachers' assessments have not picked up pupils' misunderstanding and this slows their progress.
- Good relationships and mutual respect exist between pupils and adults. Lessons flow smoothly, with pupils appreciating the help and advice they get from their teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.

- The vast majority of pupils take great pride in their work and are very determined to finish the tasks set for them. Pupils are very smart in their uniform and wear it with pride.
- Many pupils take on leadership roles, contributing impressively to the work of the school. Pupils apply to take on roles such as class representatives, prefects and school councillors and then take part in elections. All key stage 3 and 4 pupils have a 'guarantee' which supports them in aspirational activities. In the previous year, some pupils climbed Ben Nevis and Mount Snowden.
- Pupils are extremely confident and participate in assemblies using their good presentation and language skills. Inspectors noted that pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 were keen to speak about their work to other pupils and their parents during a school assembly.
- Pupils are exceptionally clear about the school's values and what is expected of them. They collect for a wide range of charities, including a local hospice, to support those less well off than themselves.
- All pupils spoken with said they are safe in school. Pupils have an extremely clear understanding of how to stay safe, including safe use of the internet. They told inspectors that bullying is rare and should it occur they were confident the school deals with it swiftly. School records confirmed that bullying is rare.
- High-quality careers information, advice and guidance provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to be well prepared for future learning and work. The school maintains links with all its pupils to make sure they settle into their college courses and employment with training. There are visits to places of employment, interviews by local employers and visits to universities to promote high aspirations.
- Pupils are pleasant, polite and well mannered. The school is free of litter and displays of pupils' work in classrooms and corridors are well cared for.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and socialise well together both in the primary and secondary buildings. Pupils are well supervised and move quickly to their lessons. Occasionally, a few older pupils exhibit boisterous behaviour but soon correct this when staff give them a reminder of the school's expectations.
- In class, behaviour is good. Pupils cooperate well with each other, their teachers and other adults. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good and they are keen to learn, especially when they are challenged appropriately by the work set for them. Very occasionally, pupils can lose concentration, although they tend not to interrupt others.
- Attendance for secondary pupils is above average over time, with below-average rates of regular absenteeism. Despite the school's efforts to ensure regular attendance in key stage 1, too many pupils are absent too often because of extended holidays. There are good systems in place to check on pupils who are absent. These include swift checks by telephone and home visits if contact is not made with parents or if the pupil is regularly absent.

- Exclusion rates from school are low. The few pupils internally isolated in school for poor behaviour have a comprehensive review of their needs and bespoke support to improve their behaviour. This very effective system shows that the small amount of internal isolation is reducing.
- Pupils, parents and staff say they believe behaviour is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Across the school, most pupils are making good progress.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have improved the quality of middle leadership to make sure pupils are making good progress in key stages 3 and 4. Pupils' progress in mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages has improved over time because teaching and leadership are now good across a wide range of subjects.
- Since the academy opened, outcomes in English have been outstanding and attainment in art has been well above average. There are excellent displays of pupils' high-quality artwork displayed around the school.
- Over time, leaders have made sure that the least able pupils are supported well by skilful teachers, particularly in Years 7 and 8. This helps the least able pupils to catch up quickly in English and mathematics. Consequently, these pupils are well prepared to meet the academic requirements of a range of subjects and are making good progress across the school.
- The most able pupils have been challenged well by the work set for them and they attain at least as well as similar pupils nationally by the end of key stage 4. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables the most able pupils to be challenged well to ensure their good progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make outstanding progress in English, with their attainment matching that of others nationally at the end of key stage 4. In mathematics, progress has been variable over time but has strengthened over the past year because of better teaching. Pupils are catching up well in mathematics and a range of subjects because of the additional support they are receiving.
- Those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress across key stages 3 and 4. Good leadership identifies the needs of these pupils precisely and teachers are well trained to support the needs of these pupils. This is a good example of the school's commitment to equality of opportunity for all.
- Pupils achieve well in the very small number of non-GCSE qualifications.
- The progress pupils make in key stage 1 requires improvement. Teaching has been inconsistent across the key stage and resulted in attainment in mathematics being below average. Work set in mathematics lacks challenge and precision to meet the varying abilities of pupils. Consequently, pupils do not make enough progress to support good outcomes. Pupils' work in books shows that too few have developed greater depth in their writing because the quality of teaching has been variable. A large proportion of disadvantaged pupils had complex special educational needs and/or disabilities and achieved less well than others.

- Pupils are making good progress in reading. Teachers are trained well in the teaching of reading skills, including early reading and phonics. Over time, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has improved and is average. By the end of Year 2, all pupils meet the standard. Pupils in key stage 1 use their phonics skills well to read and reading is developing well by the end of Year 2. The school makes sure that pupils read during holiday time by setting a reading challenge for all pupils. Secondary pupils said they enjoyed reading and that the reading challenge helped them maintain their good skills across the summer. Pupils have a good understanding of what they are reading.

Early years provision

Good

- The large majority of children enter Reception with skills that are below those typical for their age. Others, three out of 10, start Reception with skills that are significantly below typical.
- In the past three years, attainment at the end of Reception has been rising. In 2016, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development was broadly average. School information indicates similar proportions of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the last school year. Boys' attainment has improved particularly well in the past year because of good teaching.
- Children's work, from the last school year, shows that good progress was made. Disadvantaged children make good progress as teachers plan well for their needs.
- The curriculum has provided a range of exciting and challenging experiences tailored to children's interests. This supports children's good progress. Many children enter Reception with low communication skills that develop well because leaders have designed a curriculum that focuses strongly on language and communication skills.
- Children's good personal development and welfare is supported well by a range of additional activities. Children have visited a pizza restaurant to make their own pizzas as well as celebrating festivals, including Diwali and Chinese New Year.
- Leaders have made sure there is good engagement with parents. Parents said there are many opportunities to support their children's learning and find out what their children are doing in school.
- Contact with families before their children start Reception is strong. Staff visit every family home before children start Reception. This ensures that children are well prepared for school and any additional needs are identified at an early stage.
- All the appropriate welfare and safeguarding requirements are met in the provision.
- School information indicates that by the end of Reception children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	140326
Local authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	10036526

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Shepherd
Headteacher	Mick Kay
Telephone number	01422 301080
Website	http://www.thehalifaxacademy.org
Email address	admin@thehalifaxacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to academy status on 1 November 2013. When its predecessor school, Halifax High at Wellesley Park, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good.
- The Halifax Academy is an all-through school for pupils age four to 16. Currently, there are pupils in Reception, Years 1 to 3 and Years 7 to 11. The academy introduced primary education in September 2014, having appointed the head of the primary phase in April 2014. Primary education was housed in temporary accommodation until a new primary building opened in February 2016.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium is above average. Over four out of 10 pupils are disadvantaged.
- Almost all pupils are from minority ethnic groups with the vast majority of Pakistani heritage. Most pupils speak English as an additional language.

- The proportion of pupils who have support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards for progress by the end of Year 11.
- The school does not use alternative providers of education.
- The Halifax Academy recently formed the Impact Education Multi-Academy Trust and has sponsor status. Currently, the school is the only member of the trust. Recent staffing changes have occurred to support the development of the multi-academy trust.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of teaching and learning in parts of lessons. Several sessions were jointly observed with leaders.
- Throughout the two days of the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils, both individually and in groups, about learning and safety.
- Children in Reception had not started school when the inspection occurred.
- Inspectors reviewed pupils' work in lessons and analysed samples of work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors listened to primary and secondary pupils reading.
- An inspector held a meeting with the chair of the local governing body and seven other governors. The lead inspector spoke with the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors also held meetings with senior leaders and other staff.
- Inspectors looked at the school's review of its own performance, its development and improvement plan, a number of key school policies and the minutes of governing body meetings. They considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors analysed 11 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View), 30 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and 112 responses to the staff questionnaire. Also, inspectors analysed school questionnaires completed by parents.

Inspection team

Jim McGrath, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
John McNally	Ofsted Inspector
Janet Keefe	Ofsted Inspector
Natasha Greenough	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Durand	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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