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Mrs Anna Leng
Acting Principal
The Gainsborough Academy
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Lincolnshire
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Dear Mrs Leng

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Gainsborough Academy

Following my visit with Russ Barr, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 20–21 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help that you gave during the inspection and for the time that you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The academy's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all of the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner, and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2016.

- Make safeguarding effective by ensuring that there is an appropriate system for monitoring pupils' attendance, which includes rigorous checks on absences, including for those taught at other sites.
- Increase the impact of leadership so that there is rapid improvement in the achievement of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and boys, by:
 - resolving who sponsors the school quickly so that governance can focus on holding leaders to account with more rigour
 - securing effective leadership at all levels, including governance and across the school
 - ensuring the accuracy of pupils' progress information, so that leaders, governors and teachers are better informed about what they need to improve
 - eradicating weak teaching, particularly in English, mathematics and science
 - improving the monitoring of pupils' attendance by including rigorous checks on absence at an earlier stage so that actions can be taken to prevent poor attendance
 - ensuring that leaders use the pupil premium funding effectively to improve the attendance, attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils
 - making sure that leaders track closely the work they do to check that all their actions have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes
 - making sure that all members of staff are consistent in their application of school policies, including feedback to pupils.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and reduce the inconsistencies in teaching by:
 - making sure that all teachers use information about pupils' attainment and progress to provide work that is at the right level
 - planning learning activities that enable pupils to become confident learners
 - adapting learning to allow pupils of differing abilities to make good progress
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide them with work that is appropriately challenging
 - providing more bespoke professional development for members of staff, including the sharing of best practice, so that teachers can increase rates of achievement for all pupils across the curriculum, especially for boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 February 2018 to 21 February 2018

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting principal and the chief executive officer of the Wickersley Partnership Trust, which is providing support to the Gainsborough Academy, the chair of the governing body, who is also a representative of the multi-academy trust which sponsors the school, subject and pastoral leaders, leaders responsible for attendance, members of the teaching staff, and pupils. They spoke with some parents. The inspectors focused on the work carried out to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Context

Further changes have been made to leadership roles and responsibilities, since the previous monitoring visit. The arrangements for the sponsorship of the academy are still in the process of changing from the Lincoln College Academy Trust to the Wickersley Partnership Trust; the changeover is currently set to be completed in May 2018.

Since the previous monitoring visit, a notable number of members of staff have left and new members have joined the school. Combined with current levels of absence among the staff, securing stability for the pupils remains a significant challenge.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has made solid progress since the last monitoring visit. Policies, systems and ways of working which were new at the time of that visit are now up and running and beginning to have a positive effect. The school is improving, albeit from a very low base, and, as at the time of the previous visit, much remains to be done.

The senior leaders and other staff at the school are fully aware of the extent of the challenge. They express candid, well-informed and clearly focused views about what needs to be done. Increasingly, the school's leaders and the staff show drive and determination to make the necessary improvements. The senior leaders are setting out unequivocally higher expectations for the progress which the pupils should be making.

An emphasis on the pupils' progress is much more apparent than previously. The ways of working introduced at the time of the last visit are now being operated routinely. As a result, the pupils' progress is being discussed and analysed regularly and frequently. The discussions are leading to practical changes, including in approaches to teaching the pupils. Ineffective approaches to teaching are being identified and remedied.

The information collected by the school about how well the pupils are doing is now being used effectively to make decisions about the curriculum and about the organisation of classes. The staff have put into practice new policies for managing the pupils' behaviour and for marking. Variations between the ways in which these things are done are still apparent, but practice is more consistent than it was previously. As a result, the quality of teaching is now improving and the pupils' behaviour is getting better.

The information is being used to better effect in determining which pupils need additional help and what help they get subsequently. The help is focused now on meeting individual needs. The pupils with whom the inspectors spoke reported that the support which they had received was purposeful and helpful.

The arrangements for transferring the sponsorship of the school have been delayed. The delay has hampered efforts to secure effective governance of the school. Notwithstanding the commitment shown by the chair, the current governing body has maintained a 'watching brief' during this interim period, but that means governance is still not an effective force for improvement.

The chair of the governing body and the senior leaders are very aware of a high level of concern about the school among some parents and carers. The school's approaches to communicating with parents are not currently as effective as they need to be. Nevertheless, the inspectors found evidence of justifiably positive views among other parents about the improvements being made at the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The most effective teaching observed during this visit got the pupils interested and learning well. Lessons are more often better organised than they were and the pupils' learning is more structured. The lessons observed by the inspectors had a clear sense of purpose. The teachers are not always astute in noticing when the pupils' interest and concentration are beginning to wane and in taking action quickly enough to get the pupils back on board.

The pupils reported that, where the school's policy on marking their work is practised well, they are getting much better feedback that is helping them to make better progress. The pupils do not get sufficient opportunities to act on what they are told about their work, or to correct errors that the teachers have identified.

Variations in the implementation of the school's policies for teaching and learning are still evident. The variations continue to affect the pupils' progress. Nevertheless, the senior, subject and other leaders have a much clearer understanding now of where and why the pupils' progress is not good enough. They take suitable action accordingly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The pupils report being more often in an environment that enables them to learn than was the case previously. The school is generally calmer and more orderly than it was at the time of the previous visit.

The senior leaders have begun a programme of refurbishments. The refurbishments are making the appearance of the school noticeably less careworn and have made an important contribution to the calmer and more orderly atmosphere. The inspectors found no examples of graffiti during this visit and noted that litter was being removed promptly, so that the school was largely tidy. Increasingly, the correct tone is being set and the pupils are responding.

The pupils have noted the more consistent application of the school's policies for managing behaviour. The resulting improvements in the pupils' behaviour are quite recent and, overall, the pupils' behaviour is still not good enough. Levels of short-term exclusions remain high. The proportion of pupils being sanctioned in school for misbehaviour, though reduced, is also still too high.

In particular, the pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are much more likely than other pupils at the school to be given an exclusion, or to be sanctioned internally. This is an indication that the school's provision for those pupils is currently not effective enough.

The level of attendance remains too low. So far, there is little evidence of improvement. The level of persistent absence, in particular, remains too high. It has reduced by a few percentage points, but remains in need of substantial improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

The information on the pupils' performance in the national key stage 4 tests in 2017 confirms that there was no improvement in the pupils' progress at that time. Since the previous monitoring visit, the senior leaders have continued the work to establish better ways of managing and so of improving the pupils' progress. The signs of improvement evident during this visit are early, tentative and not secure, but indicate that things are beginning to move in the right direction.

Higher expectations for the progress of the pupils are beginning to come through, as a result of the much-improved and much more frequent discussion now taking place between the leaders and the staff. The pupils' work indicates currently that their progress is improving. A more positive picture is starting to emerge in the information about the pupils' progress collected by the school. It is less apparent at key stage 4 at the moment, than it is in key stage 3.

External support

The external support provided to the school has continued to be essential to the progress made to date.