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David Miller  
Principal  
The Gainsborough Academy  
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Lincolnshire  
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Dear Mr Miller

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Gainsborough Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 15 June 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2013, the school was judged to be inadequate.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- build on the improved systems of accountability to quickly remedy the remaining teaching that is less than consistently good.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, the chair of the local governing body and representatives of the Lincoln College Academy Trust, including the chief executive of the Lincoln College Group. I also met with the head of English and the acting head of mathematics. I held formal meetings with 32 pupils in small groups covering Years 7 to 10 and also spoke with pupils in the visits to lessons we made together. In all, we made short visits to eight lessons and visited the internal exclusion room. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary and records regarding pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety.

## **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection, a teacher seconded to the senior leadership team has left the school. The head of modern foreign languages left the school at the end of the spring term.

## **Main findings**

You and your colleagues are now doing the right things to improve the school. The last monitoring visit has spurred you on to be more decisive in making the urgent improvements that were needed. However, all this has come too late to have had enough impact in improving outcomes for pupils or to make it likely that the school will be judged to be good at its next section 5 inspection. You recognise this and acknowledge that this year's GCSE examination results look set to be disappointing. While they look likely to represent an improvement on last year's results, the school's assessment information indicates that they will still be worse than when the school was judged to require improvement at its last section 5 inspection.

Pupils' achievement in other years is better, though far from consistent. While there is still considerable work to do to improve pupils' progress in mathematics, pupils are catching up in mathematics more quickly than in English. This is because teaching in English remains too variable to ensure that all pupils make up for lost time. Although the school's data provides tentative evidence of improvement in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, this is inconsistent across year groups and subjects. Boys continue to achieve less well than girls.

You have grasped the nettle with regard to pupils' behaviour and shown great courage and determination in introducing a new behaviour policy in the face of considerable initial opposition from some pupils and parents. This revised policy, and the higher expectations it heralds, is making a clear difference to the pupils' experience of coming to school and their learning in lessons. Almost, though not all, pupils I spoke to were highly supportive of the new policy and the difference it is making. They were able to describe how they are now able to get on with their

work in lessons because their behaviour is so much better. Your own analysis shows that, as recently as December 2015, 17 minutes of learning time was lost on average in each lesson due to low-level disruption. This has now reduced so that the large majority of lessons take place in a calm and purposeful atmosphere. However, it is no surprise that pupils' achievement remains weak, given the amount of learning time that has been lost since the last inspection. Fewer pupils are now being excluded from the school or being sent to the internal exclusion room.

Pupils reported that, as a result of the new behaviour management system, they now feel safe in the school. They said that bullying is much reduced, though not eradicated. My scrutiny of the school's records supports this view. Pupils said that they feel more confident that the school tackles incidents of bullying than before. Indeed, this aspect of the school's work is now led effectively. The senior staff responsible scrutinise behaviour records meticulously to identify incidents that may be indicative of bullying. However, while pupils said that they feel safe at school, they also reported that they do not always feel comfortable using the school's toilet facilities, particularly the unisex toilets. This, they said, is because of the silly behaviour of some other pupils. Leaders and managers should review and improve arrangements to ensure that pupils can use the toilet facilities safely as an urgent priority.

Pupils' attendance remains too low and is chronically low in Year 11. The school's work to improve pupils' attendance has been strengthened considerably. The school is now taking the robust action necessary to challenge poor attendance. However, as with other improvements to the school, this has come too late to make the difference needed. Persistent absenteeism is still exceptionally high.

The quality of teaching is now improving, but not quickly enough to make up for the legacy of poor achievement. Most of the pupils I spoke with were able to identify how teaching has improved because pupils' behaviour is now much better. They also said that work is better matched to their needs than before, typically describing it as 'at the right level'. Pupils enjoy being able to tackle the new bronze, silver or gold activities which set different levels of challenge. More work is needed though to ensure that all teachers use this approach in the way you intend.

You have strengthened the school's appraisal system to increase accountability for staff and have devised a support programme for those whose teaching needs to improve. Your appraisal records show clearly that teaching over time is improving. However, they also show that there remains too much teaching that is less than good. The weaker teaching must be improved quickly so that pupils in all years and all classes catch up with their peers nationally.

The additional areas for improvement identified at the last monitoring inspection have been tackled effectively. While there is still work to do to improve consistency, teachers are now marking pupils' work in line with the school's marking policy. I saw good examples of improvements to pupils' work as a result of their teachers' feedback.

Work to embed a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum has been hindered by changes to staffing. The current leader responsible has a good understanding of how to fulfil her role effectively but does not have the necessary authority to hold teachers to account if they do not meet the school's expectations. This explains why, as your own analysis shows, a small minority of teachers are still not meeting the school's expectations that they correct pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Strategies to improve pupils' reading ages are proving effective and, in many cases, are having an excellent impact in improving pupils' reading skills.

Governors are holding school leaders to account effectively. They, like the sponsors, fully acknowledge that the current improvements being secured have come about far too late. Minutes from meetings of the governing body show that governors are impatient for improvement and ask pertinent and challenging questions of the school's senior team.

### **External support**

Trustees responded quickly to the findings of the last monitoring visit and immediately appointed an executive principal to support the school's improvement. This appointment is proving important in ensuring that governors and trustees have an accurate view of the school's current position. Crucially, it has also given confidence to the leadership team to stick to its guns in introducing the radical changes necessary to improve the school. I strongly recommend that this support continues into the next academic year.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local 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

Daniel Burton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**