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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 to your academy on 27 and 28 June 2017, 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2016.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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 first monitoring inspection on 27 June 2017 to 28 June 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal and a headteacher and deputy chief executive officer of Wickersley Partnership Trust, who is providing support to The Gainsborough Academy, the executive principal, the chair of the governing body, who is also a representative of the multi-academy trust which sponsors the school, subject and pastoral leaders and leaders responsible for attendance and safeguarding. The inspector focused on the work carried out to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management.

Context

An acting principal was appointed in March 2017 to lead the academy. An executive principal was appointed to be responsible for the strategic improvement of the academy. A new senior leadership team for the academy is now in post. The arrangements for the sponsorship of the academy are currently changing from the Lincoln College Academy Trust to another sponsor, yet to be confirmed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The pace of change since the inspection has, in most instances, been brisk. The work has primarily involved setting up essential new approaches to deal with the areas for improvement identified at the inspection.

The external support provided to the school has enabled the acting principal and the new senior leadership team to put in place a range of new structures, systems and procedures. The new ways of working are beginning to change the culture and climate at the school. The leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are focusing more sharply than before on improving the progress and attendance of the pupils and on eradicating weak teaching.

The subject and other leaders are responding to the changes with a renewed sense of purpose, taking the opportunities that the changes are providing to fulfil their responsibilities. Those with whom the inspector spoke had a strong sense of being enabled to do their jobs effectively.

The much-revised approach, introduced since the inspection, to managing the progress of the pupils has been the centrepiece of the improvements to date. It is already providing the school's leaders with an effective means of tracking the pupils' progress. It is now leading to good opportunities for the staff to work on and to improve the accuracy of their assessments.

The amount of change at the school has been significant and the improvements made to date have been necessary. The leaders and managers are still at the early stages of putting the changes into practice. The work has begun, but much remains to be done.

The school is hampered in planning effectively for improvements beyond the short-term. This is because the process of changing the academy's sponsor, which is effectively the external review of governance called for by the inspection, has been delayed and protracted. As a result, at the time of this visit, the arrangements for the governance of the academy and for the external support, which has been vital to the improvements to date, are not clear beyond August this year. This is unhelpful to the academy. In particular, without the current level and nature of the external support, the school lacks the internal capacity to provide effectively for the needs of newly qualified teachers. For that reason, it is strongly recommended that the school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Despite the difficulties, the governance of the school has improved since the inspection. The governing body has started to question the senior leaders sharply and purposefully, increasing the sense of accountability among the leaders. It is now making its views and expectations known. It is exercising suitable oversight of the external support for the school.

The school has completed an external review of its use of the pupil premium. A revised plan has been prepared and published, which makes clear how the funding is to be used to deal with the barriers to education faced by the eligible pupils. Actions to put the plan into practice are still at an early stage.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The senior leaders have begun the process of dealing with weak teaching. They have provided a range of support for the staff, to help them to develop the knowledge and skills needed to make improvements to the teaching. The staff have taken part in a series of training opportunities linked directly with issues identified in the areas for improvement from the inspection, including improving the achievement of boys and providing support for the most able pupils.

The new approach to tracking the progress of the pupils is providing a focal point for work to improve the accuracy of the teachers' assessments of how well the pupils are doing. It is beginning to clarify for the staff the expectations of what the pupils should be achieving.

The inspection found little evidence that the improvements made so far have changed the pupils' experiences in lessons significantly. The new information held by the school about the pupils' progress has not so far had a major impact on the way that teaching is planned. The senior, subject and other leaders are aware of that. They state, quite reasonably, that impact in the classroom is the next phase of

development for the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The attendance of the pupils has not improved significantly since the inspection. The level of persistent absence remains high, most particularly among disadvantaged pupils.

The specific failings in the school's procedures for managing attendance that were identified at the inspection have been rectified. The approaches now taken to promoting good attendance, following up on absences and checking on the attendance and progress of pupils being taught at other locations are suitable. The new approaches have not been sustained for long enough to have had a major impact to date.

The school can point to notable successes with individuals who are persistently absent. The attendance of around a half of those pupils has improved notably in recent weeks.

The pupils do not show much enthusiasm for lessons. The slightly careworn appearance of the school's corridors does not encourage the pupils to value and to show pride in their school. Small areas of damage have not been repaired promptly. Examples of graffiti, though not extensive, are apparent inside the school.

Outcomes for pupils

There is very little evidence at the moment of significant improvements in the pupils' progress since the inspection. Most of the work to date has involved laying the foundations for improved outcomes.

External support

The external support provided to the school has brought energy, a sense of purpose and direction, practical expertise and access to suitable sources for the training and professional development of the staff at Gainsborough. It has been crucial to the improvements made so far.