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17 March 2014

Mr Andrew Lund  
Headteacher  
Appleby Grammar School  
Battlebarrow  
Appleby-in-Westmorland  
Cumbria  
CA16 6XU

Dear Mr Lund

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Appleby Grammar School, Cumbria**

Following my visit to your academy on 14 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- refine action planning to identify who will be responsible for evaluating the impact of actions, and how this will be done.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, English and mathematics subject leaders, students, four members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the South Lakes Federation to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy's improvement plans were evaluated. Brief visits were made to lessons.

### **Context**

There have been no staff changes since the last inspection, although leaders in the sixth form, English and mathematics were relatively new to their role at that time.

## **Main findings**

Academy leaders, governors and staff are determined to move the academy to good in as short a time as possible. Leaders are providing a strong steer to tackle areas requiring improvement and have the support of all staff. Governors have a full understanding of current challenges and reasons for the lower than expected achievement of students in the past. They are taking robust action to tackle areas of underperformance. Leaders and governors have set challenging targets for students' achievement and teachers' performance. A lot has been achieved since the last inspection.

There are appropriate plans to tackle the areas requiring improvement. Many of the improvement areas identified at the last inspection were already priorities in the academy and sixth form improvement plans and these have been supplemented with 'post-Ofsted' action plans. The plans set clear criteria and milestones by which to measure the success of actions. They are being closely supervised to make sure that actions take place as planned. However, the plans do not currently identify who is responsible for gauging whether actions are having the intended impact on students' achievement and how this will be done. The academy plan is appropriately underpinned by subject actions plans.

Leaders have revised the system to track students' progress. It shows clearly the progress that students are making from their starting points and towards achieving good grades at GCSE. Students who are under achieving are given academic and pastoral support to help them catch up and overcome barriers to learning. The tracking is accurately based on mock examinations, assessments and students' work, which have been moderated with other schools. School records show that students' 'effort' grades are improving as a result of support and that progress is quickening in each year group. The tracking indicates that students in the current Year 11 are on track to achieve much better results at GCSE than in the previous year.

Middle leaders are improving their skills through working alongside the academy's senior leaders and subject leaders in partner schools. Changes to leadership and staffing in English and mathematics have secured improvements to teaching. During brief observations undertaken in this monitoring visit, students were purposefully engaged and were learning effectively. Leaders for English and mathematics are working closely together to make sure that students achieve well in both subjects. Lesson planning in all subjects takes account of students' prior learning and target grades, so that work builds on students' knowledge and skills appropriately. Students who spoke with me said that teaching is suitably challenging and they have a good understanding of how to improve their work.

Several changes have been made to improve the achievement of sixth form students, including new leadership since the start of this academic year. Students' progress and attendance are being carefully monitored to make sure they are on track to achieve good grades at AS and A level. Supervised study sessions and tutorials are popular with students and effective.

Students feel well supported, both academically and personally. They appreciate the 'personal touch' that they say comes from staff knowing them well. Student leaders have good opportunities to give their views on teaching and what helps them to learn. Sixth form students provide positive role models for younger students, including mentoring and support. Sixth form students say they receive good advice and guidance on higher education

and next steps. Students in Years 10 and 11 would like further information and advice about career and subject choices for the sixth form.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The academy is drawing well on support from other academies and schools in the area through the 'South Lakes Federation'. The partnership ensures that the academy's self-evaluation is challenged by external professionals and provides opportunity for leaders and teachers to share best practice with colleagues from other schools. The partnership with an outstanding teaching school and National Leader of Education is proving particularly effective.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

**Her Majesty's Inspector**