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Steve Baragwanath  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Baragwanath

### **Short inspection of University Academy Holbeach**

Following my visit to the academy on 19 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the academy was judged to be good in January 2013.

#### **This academy continues to be good.**

You have maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. Your commitment and passion remain infectious and you have been successful in driving demonstrable improvement. You have successfully combined two schools, so that the University Academy Holbeach is now truly one school. The academy is a positive and stimulating environment in which to learn. The ambition that has been set is palpable, particularly within vocational learning, and pupils know how lucky they are to have such opportunities at their fingertips. Increasing numbers of pupils are progressing successfully to positive future destinations in training, employment and university. You are rightly proud of this.

In an area of the country where the recruitment of teachers and school leaders can be challenging, you have been able to appoint high-quality leaders and teachers, including within the core subjects of mathematics and science. You have been supported effectively in this by the governing body and the Lincolnshire Education Trust. Governors are clear that, 'we now have the staff we need!'. Overwhelmingly, staff said that they felt proud to work in the academy.

You identify, accurately, the areas of the school that need further attention and plans are in place to address these. You have been creative in addressing the areas for improvement from the last inspection, but do not underestimate the challenges that some of these represent. Very sensibly, you seek support and advice from the

local governing body, the trust and from other partner schools. You make effective use of the support you receive. It is particularly exciting that you work so closely with the primary academy within the trust. More primary school pupils now make University Academy Holbeach their first choice as the secondary school they would like to attend.

Leaders, the governing body and teaching staff take the progress that is made by every pupil within the academy extremely seriously. Pupils in Year 11 meet with you individually to discuss their progress and their targets; pupils know that you know them extremely well. The way in which achievement is tracked and monitored is now more systematic. The governing body deals with the 'here and now pupils', by which it means particular groups of pupils for which individual governors have taken responsibility, and has made the decision to refine its meeting schedule, so that more time is allowed to challenge you and your leaders on the progress that pupils make. The vast majority of pupils, regardless of their background or disadvantage, make progress that is often above the national average. You are aware that the attainment of pupils is still not where it needs to be and are dogged in your efforts to improve this.

It is inspiring that you make the number of pupils who progress from the academy to university or other vocational opportunities so visible. Pupils are being shown the possibilities that exist within their community and beyond. Many more pupils are attending the sixth-form provision and are successful learners. A culture of success is developing. You know that more needs to be done, so that higher ability pupils make the progress that they should. You have correctly identified that the work provided for higher ability pupils is still not consistently challenging enough.

Since the last inspection, you have continued to ensure that more pupils attend school. Pupils' attendance is improving. For some pupils who persistently do not attend school, you know more remains to be done. There are some creative initiatives emerging from the partnership with the primary academy and the family-focused work. The academy education welfare officer is involved in preventative work within the community. A range of initiatives is in place to address the challenges faced by pupils who do not attend school. Appropriately, this issue remains an area of focus for the academy.

Pupils behave well. There is a calm atmosphere within the academy and pupils are polite and welcoming. You greet the pupils that you meet and they, in turn, greet you. Pupils clearly know and like their Principal. You have managed the issues faced when merging two schools well and have strengthened the work to ensure that the behaviour of the vast majority of pupils is good. Some pupils require specialist support, in order that they access appropriate learning and are not excluded from the academy. You are pursuing a long-term solution for this and are being supported by the governing body and the trust.

There is much to celebrate in the curriculum, which has been designed for the pupils, particularly the vocational pathways. The links with employers and local businesses are secure and pupils gain a 'real-life' experience of the world of work.

Consequently, pupil engagement is high in these subjects. You are rightly focusing on the development of literacy throughout the curriculum and are developing transition activities with the primary academy to support this. 'Saturday school' takes place each week to support Year 11 pupils in their studies and these sessions are extremely well attended. You offer a vast range of opportunities to help pupils achieve. Rightly, you continue to tackle the issues that remain in some subject areas, particularly in modern foreign languages, English and physical education.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have kept up to date with the government guidance about how to keep pupils safe. Preventative measures are in place and staff are very clear about their responsibilities. Referrals to the local authority are made in a timely manner and records are kept meticulously. Pupils said that they felt safe and that they had a range of people they knew they could speak with if they needed help. You place a high priority on safeguarding pupils. The arrangements you have made for dealing with concerns are fit for purpose.

### **Inspection findings**

- You have merged two schools to become the University Academy Holbeach. This is genuinely one school and you have engendered a culture that is helping pupils to achieve and progress to work and further learning. More parents within the community want their children to attend your academy.
- Governors are very knowledgeable about school improvement. The business of the local governing body is managed well, so that time and attention can be focused on the progress that pupils make. Governors are able to hold you and your leaders to account effectively. The academy benefits greatly from the leadership of the Chair of the Governing Body.
- The vocational curriculum is a strength of the academy. Pupils experience 'gobsmacking' facilities and they thrive as a result. The sixth form has almost doubled in size and, this year, 34 learners accepted university places.
- Attendance has improved. Persistent absence has reduced, particularly for those pupils entitled to pupil premium funding and those pupils supported by a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. There remains a 'hard core' of pupils who persistently do not attend school. You know who these pupils are. You know the challenges involved. You recognise this as an area to improve.
- Pupils enter the academy with starting points that are significantly lower than those seen nationally. Pupils, including the disadvantaged, progress well. The attainment of pupils still remains below the national average. The ambition should be set so that attainment meets or exceeds national levels. The culture you have established is now ripe to ensure that more pupils achieve more than the expected progress.

- Higher ability pupils do not make the progress that they should in some of their lessons, including English and mathematics. Not all lessons challenge them appropriately. The strategic planning in place to address this issue is not sufficiently focused.
- There is still underperformance in some curriculum areas, particularly modern foreign languages and physical education.
- You have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. However, planning for improvement is insufficiently focused and does not have clear enough milestones that are easy to monitor in order to drive rapid improvement. This means that close monitoring cannot take place to make sure that planned actions are having the required impact.
- More effective solutions need to be in place to ensure that fewer pupils are excluded from the academy.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the percentage of pupils who gain five A\*–C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics meets the national average and that more pupils achieve the higher grades
- steps are taken to secure good-quality alternative provision for pupils at risk of exclusion
- the persistent absence of a 'hard core' of pupils is effectively addressed
- school improvement planning is sufficiently strategic and focused and that the impact of key actions is more regularly monitored.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, and representatives of the governing body and the Lincolnshire Educational Trust. Meetings were held with the vice-principal, the designated safeguarding lead, and two newly qualified teachers. Inspectors visited parts of 15 lessons across the main school and parts of five lessons within the vocational provision. Some observations of teaching were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors observed behaviour around the school, and at break- and lunchtimes. Inspectors spoke with two groups of pupils, including those who had previously been excluded from school. Inspectors considered the views of 40 parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Inspectors considered the views of 128 responses to the inspection questionnaire for school staff. A range of documents and school policies was reviewed, including the school's self evaluation, the draft academy improvement plan 2016/17, the marking and child protection policies and information about pupils' performance.