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22 March 2016

Mrs Louise Laming
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Laming

Short inspection of Lincoln Castle Academy

Following my visit to the school on 2 March 2016 with Tracey Ydlibi, Ofsted Inspector, 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 your school was judged to be good in October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You became headteacher in September 2014 and have been relentless in your mission to build an uncompromising culture of success. Difficult decisions have been made and swift actions taken to make sure the school continues to be good. You said that leaders needed to be 'brave' to make the changes required. You and your team have been brave. The ambition you have set is palpable. Pupils and middle leaders are effusive in their appreciation of the difference you have made and the positive impact you have had.

You have skilfully overcome significant challenges. You told me that the most important thing was 'doing the right thing for our academy'. You recognise that within the community, the school has a positive reputation for the care, support and guidance of pupils. You are proud of this. Additionally you now want pupils to 'embrace the fascination of all that is academic'. The curriculum has been devised with this in mind and all pupils now have the opportunity to take part in a vast array of clubs, activities, trips and adventures. Pupils say that they appreciate the wealth of opportunities that is now available to them. They enjoy their lessons and the knowledge and skills they gain as a result.

Crucially, you are now making sure that the quality of teaching within the school is consistently of high quality. There are new subject leaders of mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages. These leaders are doing a good job. Subject leaders said that they felt 'trusted to do their job'. They appreciate being

held to account for ensuring that pupils make good progress as well as the support they receive in order to do this.

There are sophisticated systems in place to check that pupils are learning as they should and a well-understood programme of support for those pupils who need help to catch up. These are having a clear impact in raising achievement. The pupils in Year 11 spoke very positively about the quality of teaching they receive. They also said how they appreciate the very well planned programme of revision and intervention which ensures that they are not overburdened by conflicting priorities. Year 13 learners said that they value being taught by 'experts'. Pupils in Year 7 said that they love the fact that their head of year teaches them art. 'We like that she supports us and also teaches us.'

You understand well the remaining challenges that are still to be faced and have rigorous plans in place to tackle these. You know the importance of ensuring that results continue to improve. School information predicts rapid gains at GCSE and A level for all pupils currently at the school, including those pupils entitled to free school meals. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive effective intervention to help them access learning. You know that strategies to provide equally effective support for pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities are not as well developed.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a strong ethos and culture of safeguarding. Staff are well trained and clear about their responsibilities. Partnership working is effective and referrals to the local authority are made in a timely fashion. Concerns are followed up carefully and with consideration. Pupils said that they feel safe. They said that there was nowhere in the school where they feel unsafe and that bullying is extremely rare. They appreciated the speed at which problems are addressed and the range of agencies available to them, for example, the counselling service. Pupils spoke with inspectors about the training they received to help them keep safe outside of school; this included learning about the radicalisation of young people and the ways in which to keep safe online. Pupils behave well around the school and particularly well where teaching quality is good. They wear their uniform with pride.

Inspection findings

- You have changed the culture of the school and leaders, governors, staff and pupils have bought in to your vision. More parents are opting to choose Lincoln Castle Academy as their first-choice secondary school. You must now make sure that all pupils make the accelerated progress required to address areas of weaker performance.
- Governors are very knowledgeable about the strategies needed to secure improvement at the school. Members of the governing body have the necessary skills to hold leaders to account. It is clear that the governing body have stood shoulder to shoulder with you when difficult decisions regarding staffing have been required. They are highly committed to the school and are making a valuable contribution to the school's improvement.

- Leadership is now much stronger than when you joined the school. You have restructured the senior leadership team to ensure that you have the capacity to drive the remaining developments required. Subject and middle leadership has undergone substantial and positive change. There is a positive 'can-do' feel to the leadership of the school and a real sense of excitement as to what can be achieved. It is critical that leaders continue to be closely held to account to ensure that improvement at subject level is sustained.
- Leaders are rightly focusing their attention on raising achievement where it is weaker. Last year, some pupils underperformed in a few subject areas, particularly mathematics and science. The school's latest tracking information, based on the improvements seen in pupils' mock examination results and other assessments, indicates strongly that results in previously weaker subjects are likely to improve significantly this year.
- Assessment has improved. Pupils told inspectors that marking has become much better since you became the headteacher. The school's marking policy is being applied increasingly consistently. Some lower-ability pupils do not benefit from the written feedback provided by their teachers because they find it difficult to read their teachers' comments. Sometimes their work is incomplete or continues to be untidy and badly presented.
- You are keen for the school to be outward-facing. Your work within the Academy of Lincoln Trust means that transition arrangements between Year 6 and Year 7 are much improved. The development work undertaken with the Lincolnshire Learning Partnership (LLP) is helping other leaders to feel empowered to 'take risks'. You accurately identify where external partners can support planned improvements. There is no doubt that you also have good practice to share.
- The achievement gap between those pupils eligible for free school meals and other pupils nationally is closing at an increasingly rapid pace. Expectations of what can be achieved by these pupils have increased. Plans are in place to increase further the post-16 participation of disadvantaged pupils.
- Some pupils are incorrectly identified as requiring special educational needs support. You know that the process of identification and the support that is then offered also needs to be reviewed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the identification of pupils who require special educational needs support is accurate and that appropriate intervention is in place for those who require it
- gaps in attainment between pupils who are entitled to free school meals and other pupils nationally continue to narrow.

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 County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, representatives of the governing body and the Academy of Lincoln Trust. Meetings were held with senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead. I met with the subject leaders of English, science, mathematics, humanities and modern foreign languages. Inspectors visited lessons across the school, including in English and mathematics. Some observations of teaching were jointly undertaken with senior leaders. Inspectors observed behaviour around the school. Inspectors spoke with a group of pupils, including learners within post-16 provision. Inspectors considered the views of 40 parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Inspectors considered the views of 41 respondents to the inspection questionnaire for school staff. A range of documents and school policies were reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' performance.