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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Richard Hanson
Principal
Lincoln Castle Academy
Riseholme Road
Lincoln
Lincolnshire
LN1 3SP

Dear Mr Hanson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Lincoln Castle Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 21 and 22 February 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in July 2022.

During the inspection, Matthew Sammy, Paul Sweeney, Peter Cole and Sue Wood, Ofsted Inspectors (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, subject leaders, staff, trustees and governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, met with pupils and scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I also held two conversations with representatives from the local authority. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Lincoln Castle Academy remains inadequate and has serious weaknesses. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen relationships between school and home, helping pupils and their families to understand and be reassured about the changes taking place so that more pupils enjoy school and achieve as well as they should.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the previous graded inspection, you have ensured that the school has the leadership capacity it needs to improve. You have made several new appointments to oversee the school's arrangements for pastoral care. These include a lead learning manager and a senior inclusion manager. Four new subject leaders have taken up post, one each in English, humanities, mathematics and music. You are working to achieve permanent staffing in all subjects. The proportion of temporary staff has reduced.

The number of students on roll in the sixth form has fallen. Currently, students are studying subjects in Year 13 only. Leaders have not recruited any new students into Year 12. Leaders have acted swiftly to improve the quality of education in the sixth form for the remaining students. Students say that, despite their feelings of having been let down in the past, they are now well supported on their academic courses. Their achievement is improving. Staff have supported students well towards their next steps in education, employment or training.

The school's curriculum in key stages 3 and 4 is developing. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils. They have raised expectations of what pupils can achieve, addressing a legacy of past underachievement. Subject leaders have started the process of reviewing the content of the curriculum. They are identifying the important knowledge that pupils need to remember and when. Leaders know that this improvement priority is at an early stage of development across many subjects. Some subjects are at a more advanced stage than others.

You have invested significant resources in staff's professional development. Leaders have provided opportunities for staff to develop their subject knowledge. Staff say they value the increased professional learning opportunities extended to them. It is too soon to see the full impact of this support on pupils' achievement.

In some subjects, teachers present information clearly. They use their subject knowledge well to question pupils and check their understanding. This was evident in history, music and travel and tourism, for example. However, the implementation of the curriculum remains too variable in and between different subjects. Pupils do not always understand the knowledge they are learning. Teachers do not always check that pupils have understood key ideas before moving on to a different task. When this happens, pupils lose confidence and their focus drifts. They develop gaps in their knowledge and do not achieve as well as they could. Sometimes, learning is still disrupted, particularly when pupils do not have a permanent member of staff teaching them. This continues to be a source of frustration to pupils.

Pupils at an early stage of reading are receiving the extra help they need to improve their reading skills. Leaders have ensured that there is a clear programme in place, provided by a suitably trained adult. However, staff do not check the impact of this support on how well these pupils learn the full curriculum. Leaders are at an early stage of promoting a

culture of reading throughout the school. You have recently invested in a new, well stocked library and hope to appoint a librarian soon.

Leaders, with close support from the trust, have improved the provision for pupils with SEND. The support for pupils with education, health and care plans is improving, although this is at an early stage of development. Staff in the school's new 'Bridge' facility are helping to ensure that those pupils who need tailored support receive it. Staff are improving their engagement with parents and carers in reviewing the progress of pupils with SEND. However, how the curriculum is delivered has not yet been adapted well enough to meet the needs of all pupils with SEND in all subjects.

Leaders are improving the programme for pupils' personal development. Leaders overseeing the curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education are reviewing the school's provision, known as 'Life'. Leaders have ensured that pupils in key stage 4 have received independent careers advice to help them prepare for the next stage of their education. They are aware of the options available to them. Pupils in Year 9 say that they have been well supported in selecting their option subjects for key stage 4.

Leaders are providing effective support for pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour at school. The school's 'Matrix' room enables pupils to re-set effectively their readiness to learn. The new 'Personalised Learning Centre' provides close support for pupils at risk of exclusion. Although improving, however, rates of internal and external suspension remain high.

The school is calm and orderly. There are many polite and courteous pupils. Leaders have raised their expectations of pupils' behaviour and conduct. The implementation of the school's behaviour policy, however, is still too variable. Pupils say that they understand the policy but not all of the school's rules. Many pupils say that the school's policy is implemented inconsistently, and sometimes unfairly, by staff. They are frustrated by this. Pupils do not always feel that staff listen to them. Furthermore, they do not feel that the school's reward system is having a positive impact. As a result, relationships between staff and pupils are not yet as positive as they could be. Pupils do not enjoy school as much as they should. Many parents who expressed an opinion echo the sentiments of their children.

Pupils' attendance at school is improving, although not as quickly as it needs to. Despite a range of appropriate strategies, too many pupils continue to be regularly absent from school.

Leaders have ensured that the school's arrangements for safeguarding continue to be effective. They have enhanced communication between key staff so that pupils at risk of harm receive the help that they need. Pupils know how to keep safe, including learning about online safety and the risks associated with radicalisation. Leaders have recently introduced a new system to help pupils report any concerns about bullying. When reported, staff act swiftly to ensure that pupils are protected from harm. However, not all pupils say they feel confident in sharing their worries with staff.

Trust leaders have supported the school, helping to secure rapid improvements in the sixth form and in the provision for pupils with SEND. The trust has facilitated external support to help drive improvements in the quality of education. Trustees have an accurate and realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They know what needs to improve further. They recognise that relationships between school and home are not yet where they need to be.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Harbour Learning Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
His Majesty's Inspector