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Piccadilly Gate
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M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Rachael Skelton
Headteacher
The Gainsborough Academy
Sweyn Lane
Gainsborough
Lincolnshire
DN21 1PB

Dear Mrs Skelton

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Gainsborough Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 10 and 11 May 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 September 2022.

During the inspection, Chris Davies, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), John Craig, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Joanne Ward (OI) and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust, other staff, external stakeholders, 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, as well as the provisions that support pupils with behaviour, with induction to the school and with their social and emotional needs. We met with leaders responsible for the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, alternative provision, reading, pupils' personal development, teaching and learning and staff professional development. We met with subject leaders as well as groups of pupils and staff. We reviewed a sample of work in pupils' books. We observed pupils during social times. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

The Gainsborough 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 progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the previous inspection, you have appointed a new associate assistant headteacher who is the designated safeguarding lead. They took up their post in March 2023. You have also appointed a new assistant headteacher with responsibility for the provision for pupils' personal development. They have been in their role since April 2023. This is in addition to the significant changes in leadership which took place in the academic year before the previous inspection.

Leaders have ensured that there is a well-sequenced curriculum in place. Staff work closely with trust subject directors to design broad curriculums. Subject directors of learning are continuing to develop the ways in which the design of the different subject curriculums helps pupils to add new knowledge to existing knowledge.

The teaching of the school's curriculum is improving. At the time of the previous inspection, leaders had not ensured that teachers were checking pupils' understanding and adapting their teaching accordingly. This aspect of teachers' practice has developed positively. There is a consistent approach to assessment. Leaders have ensured that teachers are aware of, and use, a range of strategies to check pupils' understanding. Some teachers do not always use these strategies to ensure that pupils have understood the clear and accurate explanations of important knowledge that they provide. Leaders recognise this. They ensure that training opportunities are provided which help staff to improve their teaching.

Pupils are able to talk about current learning. They are not yet confident in recalling prior learning. Leaders understand this and are providing teachers with the training they need to help pupils recall and connect their learning over time. This work is beginning to have an impact.

Leaders have prioritised reading. They have identified a range of texts which include important ideas that leaders want pupils to engage with. Teachers have completed training about how to share texts with pupils. Pupils who need extra help with their reading are promptly identified. They receive targeted support to develop their reading fluency and comprehension. Leaders have refined their approach to supporting pupils with reading and are having a greater positive impact as a result.

At the time of the previous inspection, many pupils did not behave well during social times or between lessons. Leaders have introduced strategies to address this. Pupil behaviour is improving. Many pupils are calm during social times. Some pupils continue to make poor choices. Staff address poor behaviour when it occurs. A range of provisions have been created to ensure that behaviour in lessons and around the school site is calmer. These provisions are having a positive impact. Leaders are continuing to develop the teaching in these provisions, for example ensuring that there is specialist teaching for each subject in place from September 2023. Instances of poor behaviour have significantly reduced. Some pupils comment that they recognise improvements in behaviour. Leaders record and analyse behaviour incidents to enable improvement work to continue.

Leaders are determined to reduce incidents of bullying. They record and investigate every allegation of bullying. They provide support for pupils who have been affected by bullying. While some pupils said they would share worries about bullying with staff, many said they would not. Some pupils do not yet have confidence in staff to deal with bullying. Leaders use a 'you said, we did' approach to communicate with pupils about how they have responded to pupil concerns. Some pupils do not yet recognise improvements in relation to bullying.

Leaders have designed a well-sequenced personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. This has been in place since leaders conducted a review after the previous inspection. Leaders, in collaboration with the trust, have developed the curriculum further for teaching from September 2023. More curriculum time will be committed to PSHE education. The new curriculum will more deliberately revisit prior learning and provide opportunities for pupils to return to key themes in increasingly complex ways.

Trust leaders have developed a model of leadership which creates capacity for this school to develop staff and sustain improvement. Trustees, governors and leaders are committed to the importance of staff well-being. Staff talk positively about the support they receive. They say that workload is manageable and that the sharing of resources and expertise with other schools in the trust helps to improve teaching as well as reduce workload. Leaders are also committed to providing staff with professional development opportunities. Leaders organise training for staff which focuses on trust and school priorities. Staff also have opportunities to identify their own individual training needs. Staff talk positively about the impact of this training on their teaching and on pupils' experiences in the classroom.

Leaders work with external partners, including the police and behaviour support agencies, to help pupils improve their behaviour. They value the input of these professionals and their insight into pupils' experiences beyond school. Leaders appreciate external expertise in providing strategies for pupils to begin to regulate their behaviour. This work with external agencies is part of a concerted effort that leaders are making to engage with the community that the school serves.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Wickersley multi-academy 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

Matthew Fearn-Davies
His Majesty's Inspector