

# Risdene Academy

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Vice Principal: Mrs Liz Abel

School Business Manager: Mrs S. Bell

21<sup>st</sup> September 2017

Dear Parents/Carers,

In July 2017, the school was visited by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors who carried out a Section 8 inspection to see how far the school had progressed since its special measures judgement in January 2017.

There were only 2 outcomes possible from our Section 8 Inspection; one being that effective action has been taken to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection to become a good school, or that there has not been effective action taken. The next line from the HMI report may read as disappointing as it contains the following statement: Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

This decision was based on a range of activities. Since the visit the school has received positive news that the attainment data for the End of Key Stage 2 was above that of the previous year, showing an improvement trend. The progress data for the End of Key Stage 2 has also been released which has also significantly improved from the previous year. Both of which shows the school is moving in the right direction but was not part of the HMI visit judgement.

Before forming your opinions or making judgements about the decision, we urge you to read the full report. The reports evidence and findings clearly states the instability in permanent staff significantly impacted on where the school was and that we are in a very different position this academic year.

The following information is taken directly from the reports evidence and findings:

*The principal and vice-principal are a dynamic and confident team. Since their respective appointments, senior leaders have faced many challenges, such as the difficulties of recruiting staff and improving the quality of teaching and learning during turbulent times. Despite these challenges, they have remained focused on the school's priorities since the last Ofsted inspection in January 2017. They are committed to improving outcomes for every child and have the skills and expertise to make this happen. They are developing a senior leadership team that embraces their vision.*

*Despite leaders' best efforts to recruit staff, the instability of staffing has contributed to leaders being unable to significantly improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school throughout this academic year. However, the principal and vice principal have now appointed a full complement of teachers for the forthcoming year and are confident that they will be able to make improvements to all areas of the school.*

*The principal and vice-principal have reorganised the school's curriculum, taking into account the current national assessment framework. They have worked with staff to create a curriculum that is both interesting and stimulating. The curriculum is linked to a story book and all subjects are planned around the class book's key themes. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 have been studying 'Kensuke's Kingdom', and used the themes in the book to explore building shelters for design and technology and aspects of world geography. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 have been reading the class text based on 'The Village that Vanished' and have explored life in different communities linked to their personal, social and health education. Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they enjoy the curriculum and find it interesting. Leaders acknowledge that staffing instability and the broader issues they have had to manage and prioritise have prevented them from fully evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum in improving pupils' outcomes.*

Recently, senior leaders appointed new leaders for English and mathematics for the new academic year. The new mathematics leader has already received training, so she is able to begin to develop teachers' subject knowledge as soon as she starts. New subject leaders understand that developing teachers' subject knowledge and skills is a key priority so pupils' outcomes improve rapidly. Senior leaders acknowledge the importance of developing subject leaders' skills so they can effectively check on the quality of teaching and learning, which includes the checking of pupils' workbooks. Senior leaders have not had the capacity to fully implement this aspect of school development. The principal has swiftly ensured that there are opportunities for pupils' assessment information to be moderated. This occurs during local cluster meetings as well as during moderation meetings with other schools from the academy trust.

The leader for special educational needs and/or disabilities is developing her leadership skills and is well supported by senior leaders. She has highlighted the areas for development through an action plan and ensured that pupils' progress information and evidence towards their individual targets is now recorded robustly. Nevertheless, the leader for this area knows that, currently, the checks made on the quality of teaching for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not helping to improve teaching quickly enough. Her detailed action plans show how more frequent checks, and how these will be followed up by training, will be undertaken in the forthcoming academic year.

Training to support the broad and acute needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities at the school has been delivered. For example, staff have received training for supporting pupils with autism; for supporting pupils who have complex emotional needs; and for developing sensory skills and providing physical activities to support pupils' well-being.

The principal has recognised and urgently addressed the need to develop pupils' well-being at the school so pupils are able to develop the required skills to learn effectively. The principal has successfully secured funding to enable the school to introduce a personal, social and health education curriculum to develop a positive school culture in the forthcoming academic year. Leaders have rightly acknowledged the importance of parental engagement and ensured that there are more opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's learning and in the broader school life. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils have been rehearsing a play as part of their curriculum. Pupils who spoke with the inspector explained they were excited to be performing in front of their parents. Parents have attended class workshops based on Greek pottery and junk modelling. They have been invited to class assemblies and induction meetings for parents of children new to the early years.

The sport premium spending has had success, with sports coaches providing training for staff as well as a range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they enjoy the range of after-school clubs, such as judo, art club, football and netball club. Leaders are aware that greater evaluation of the sports provision is needed to ensure that it meets the changing needs of the pupils. Pupils said they enjoy reading, and could talk about their favourite authors. Leaders acknowledge they need to ensure that there are more opportunities for pupils to read regularly and foster positive attitudes for reading at home and at school. The academy advisory board know its role is to challenge the principal and ensure that pupils' outcomes improve rapidly. Board members are developing their capacity in this regard. They have a broad range of skills and are realistic about the challenges ahead to improve pupils' achievement. They ensure that they are well informed and attend appropriate training so they can better meet the needs of whole-school development. The chair of the board meets regularly with the principal. Board members receive pupil assessment information but are aware that until staffing instability is fully resolved, pupil assessment information is not as reliable as it could be. They are sufficiently informed about the school's priorities and the actions required to raise pupils' outcomes. Opportunities for pupils to extend their writing skills in key stage 1 are improving. Pupils have increasingly more opportunities to apply their writing skills. Pupils' workbooks show that teachers are providing opportunities for pupils to extend their writing across a range of styles. For example, pupils are writing diary entries, biographies, newspaper articles and balanced arguments. Where teaching is effective, teachers have high expectations of pupils, particularly the most able pupils, who are challenged through learning tasks that meet their specific needs. Pupils are focused and work hard to produce their best work. During the inspection, the inspector listened to pupils read. Pupils could talk about their reading books and answer most questions. Pupils are having more opportunities to develop their

comprehension skills. The principal has introduced new reading comprehension programmes to ensure that pupils regularly practise these skills.

The principal and vice-principal recognise that personal development, behaviour and welfare of the pupils is a priority, so pupils can learn effectively. Leaders understand the need to create a positive, caring and nurturing environment where every pupil feels valued.

As a result of a coherent approach to managing pupils who receive additional support for specific emotional and behavioural needs, pupils are able to participate in lessons well where teaching is effective. Teachers and teaching assistants know how to meet pupils' needs, manage pupils' emotions positively and provide learning tasks to meet their specific needs. Senior leaders have worked hard to raise the aspirations of pupils. They have effectively organised a pupil forum group, where pupils meet the principal on a weekly basis to discuss how to improve the school. Pupils who spoke with the inspector explained they had asked the principal for more equipment so that they can play games during their break times. Pupils who are house captains wear their badges with pride; collecting house points and helping in assemblies. The Sports Crew are also busy providing and organising activities on the playground for younger pupils. Leaders make positive links between these responsibilities and the school's values of 'positivity, respect, integrity, determination and excellence'. Pupils who spoke to the inspector stated clearly that they feel more involved in school life and can contribute positively. They value the time they have with the principal to make suggestions and witness their ideas become a reality. Pupils are proud of their school and are keen for it to improve further. They look forward to the recently planned trips and visits in the new academic year.

I want to reassure you that every member of the school community recognises that there is still a significant amount of work to be done and that we are all working to ensure the best outcomes for our pupils. We have clear monitoring cycles in place to assess the impact of our strategies and actions across all areas and will regularly share the outcomes with you through our newsletters. We have already completed teaching and learning observations of all staff members. The subject leads have monitored English, Maths and SEN provision, looking at the learning environment, pupils' work and the planning. They have provided timely feedback whilst assessing the impact of the changes being made and this will continue through a regular cycle. However, please rest assured that we will not stop there and we will continue to build on the good work recognised in the HMI letter and continue with the actions and plans that have been deemed fit for purpose by the HMI to ensure we provide our children with an education that:

*Ensures our children are given the opportunities to **DREAM** of a bright future, **BELIEVE** in themselves, and **ACHIEVE** their highest potential in school and throughout their life so that they can truly make a difference wherever they go.*

The full version of the letter is available on the school's website at: [www.risdene-academy.net/risdene/ourschool/reports](http://www.risdene-academy.net/risdene/ourschool/reports), but should you wish to have a paper copy these can be obtained from the school office upon request.

Thank you for your continued support and should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Miss K. Mills