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Miss Kerry Mills
Principal
Risdene Academy
Newton Road
Rushden
Northamptonshire
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Dear Miss Mills

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Risdene Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the Education Fellowship Trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

The academy should take further action to:

- immediately improve the quality of governance
- ensure that the principal receives dedicated leadership support that is on the ground, in the school and helping to drive improvement
- address the staffing issues
- ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment rapidly improves, particularly in Years 1, 3 and 4
- ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective, high-quality support so that their progress is boosted and they achieve as they should.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the academy principal and two further

principals from within the Education Fellowship Trust, one of whom had provided school improvement support to the school in his previous role as academy outcomes director. A telephone conversation took place with the chair of the academy advisory board. A meeting took place with two further representatives of this board. I scrutinised the academy development plan and information about pupils' performance. I checked the school single central record of staff.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, conducted in April 2016, the principal and deputy principal have left the school. Seven members of the teaching staff and seven support members of staff have also left. A new principal is in place, who took up the post in September 2016. Four new members of teaching staff have joined the school. Currently, the deputy headteacher, new to the school, is on long-term sickness leave. The leaders of key stage 1 and key stage 2 are also new to their roles. There is no subject leader for mathematics. The chair of the academy advisory board is due to step down from her role in December 2016.

Main findings

You have had considerable impact in the brief time that you have been in post. You have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and recognise that standards have declined since the previous inspection. You are successfully establishing a 'no-excuses culture' and you are ambitious to make sure that the school improves. However, you have been badly let down by the inadequate support and inadequate governance you have received from the Education Fellowship Trust.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant decline in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and in pupils' outcomes. In 2016, pupils at the end of key stage 2 achieved much less than national in reading, writing and mathematics. Most-able pupils did not achieve at the levels of which they were capable. Disadvantaged pupils achieved much less than other pupils in the school and other pupils nationally. These pupils have now left and moved to their secondary school. They were not prepared well for this next stage in education and have been failed by Risdene Academy.

Before they left, the principal and deputy principal supported other schools within the trust, sometimes for extended periods. This removed them from their main task of improving Risdene Academy. The trust added leadership capacity to other schools at the expense of pupils within this school.

The trustees of the Education Fellowship Trust are responsible for the overall governance of the academy. Local governance of the school is by the academy advisory board. Governors have not afforded accurate oversight; they have not challenged leaders and made sure that rapid school improvement takes place. They

have not made sure that support to the school is of high quality, is of the correct quantity and that it makes a difference to pupils.

You recognise that there is insufficient leadership capacity within the school in order to drive the rapid improvement needed. You are demonstrating a talent for leadership but you cannot drive improvement alone. You do not have an effective leadership team. The deputy headteacher, new to the school, is now on long-term sickness leave. There is no subject leader for mathematics. The leaders that are in post are new to their roles and require significant high-quality support in order that they conduct these roles effectively. You are not receiving adequate leadership support in order to address these issues. The work you are undertaking alone is not sustainable.

As the new principal, you have inherited staffing difficulties. Many teaching staff and support staff have left the school and some of these vacancies remain unfilled. This means that the quality of teaching is too variable and in some classes is weak. In Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4 the quality of teaching is not good enough to help pupils make the progress of which they are capable. In Year 3 and Year 4 particularly, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not receiving the support that they need and are not making even adequate progress. This is a serious issue for the school. Until the quality of teaching improves, pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, will not make the progress that they should.

We discussed the academy development planning and the way in which this planning could be adapted. You recognise the need to have clear milestones for when actions should be undertaken. You know to hold leaders to account for their areas of responsibility. However, until you have the leaders and the teachers you will not be able to implement fully these school improvement plans. Equally, until you have effective support and governance, your ability to halt the decline in standards will be severely limited.

External support

I have serious concerns about the governance and the quality of support that this school has received from the Education Fellowship Trust.

At the first monitoring inspection, it was agreed that further action should be undertaken. The promised support from the trust has not materialised. The principal, new to the school and to headship, is not receiving the support she requires in order to address the inadequate quality of leadership and management, pupils' outcomes, teaching learning and assessment. As a result of my concern, I am recommending an early reinspection of the school.

The quality of governance is inadequate.

I am copying this letter to the academy advisory board, the chief executive of the Education Fellowship Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
Her Majesty's Inspector