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

Special measures monitoring inspection of Risdene Academy

Following my visit with Rebecca Eilers, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 2 and 3 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint one newly qualified teacher.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy advisory board and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy 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

Peter Stonier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2017.

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school to accelerate the progress of pupils in mathematics, reading, writing and science, especially the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities by:
 - raising the expectations of what pupils, especially the most able, are capable of achieving in lessons
 - dealing promptly with pupils' misconceptions
 - providing carefully planned activities and high-quality support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
 - ensuring that the most able mathematicians are regularly provided with challenging problems to apply their skills
 - developing pupils' extended writing skills, especially in key stage 1
 - teaching reading comprehension skills effectively
 - improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons so that they are consistently positive, especially in Years 1 to 4
 - ensuring that teachers' assessment practices are reliable and well understood by staff and pupils.
- Improve pupils' behaviour, personal development and welfare by:
 - developing existing strategies to support pupils at risk of exclusion
 - creating more opportunities for pupils to take on roles of responsibility
 - improving pupils' understanding of the world and the society in which they live, including faiths, cultures and communities other than their own, to prepare them well for life in modern Britain
 - building on current work to improve pupils' conduct, attitudes and respect for others.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - implementing and monitoring an effective curriculum, across all subjects, to meet the challenges of the current national assessment framework
 - monitoring pupils' workbooks more rigorously to check the effectiveness of teaching for all groups of pupils
 - equipping subject leaders with the skills to carry out their monitoring duties and teacher development activities effectively

- ensuring that pupils' assessment information is moderated effectively to ensure its reliability
- reviewing the effectiveness of the school's use of SEN funding and the quality of leadership of this area
- improving the quality of communication and engagement with parents
- implementing and regularly evaluating the pupil premium and the sports premium spending strategies
- developing the wider extra curriculum to enhance pupils' skills and interests
- ensuring that the principal is supported well by a strong and effective leadership team
- ensuring that governance at all levels is strong and effective enough to challenge school leaders and hold them to account for the school's progress
- strengthening strategies to improve pupils' reading skills and enjoyment.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 May 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited all year groups, observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes and listened to pupils read. Inspectors met with a group of pupils, a newly qualified teacher, trust representatives, three governors from the academy advisory board, the principal, deputy principal, subject and phase leaders and parents and carers at the start of the day. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including those relating to pupils' attainment and progress, school improvement and safeguarding.

Context

The principal is currently absent on maternity leave, although she attended for the two days of the inspection. She is set to return to the school towards the end of the summer term 2018. The deputy principal is currently the temporary acting principal. An experienced school leader is in place to cover the role of the deputy principal. Subject leaders for English and mathematics and leaders responsible for each phase commenced their roles in September 2017. The school now has a full complement of permanent teaching staff. The school is planning to leave the Education Fellowship Trust and join the Manor Learning Trust by the end of the current academic year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal and vice-principal are a formidable team. They are determined to bring about sustainable improvements and ensure improved outcomes for all pupils. They have the confidence of staff, governors and parents. School improvement plans contain relevant actions, milestones and monitoring opportunities that ensure that leaders are held to account for their areas of responsibility. Leaders' evaluations of the school's strengths and development areas are accurate. Leaders are working effectively on the appropriate areas of improvement. Consequently, the school is improving quickly.

Leaders have implemented an effective curriculum across a range of subjects that meet the challenges of the current national assessment framework. Teachers are now, for example, consistently planning lessons from the most recent national curriculum documents in English and mathematics. The wider curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils are benefiting from educational visits. Most recently, Years 1 and 2 visited a zoo to develop their knowledge of animals, and pupils in Years 5 and 6 have recently enjoyed a residential visit in order to develop their outdoor and adventure skills. Pupils also experience a variety of after-school clubs in different sports and the arts.

There is now a timetable informing leaders and teachers when monitoring activities, such as lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' workbooks, are to occur. Subject leaders are becoming increasingly effective in their evaluations of the strengths and development areas in their subjects. For example, subject leaders identified that teachers were consistently using the school's marking and feedback policy. They also identified that not all of the most able pupils were challenged effectively in mathematics. Leaders responsible for English and mathematics are receiving specific, recognised leadership training. They have written effective action plans that allow governors on the academy advisory board to hold them to account. Consequently, subject leaders now have a much clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Leaders have ensured that teachers' judgements of pupils' standards in writing are accurate. Frequent moderation exercises with other local schools have helped to validate these judgements. Consequently, the governors on the academy advisory board are confident that progress and attainment information about pupils' writing is secure. Leaders are aware that a next step for the school is to mirror this process in mathematics. Assessment judgements for children leaving the Reception class were moderated last year as part of a local early years cluster group. As a result, the governors on the academy advisory board are satisfied that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2017 was accurate.

The leader for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is currently undertaking a nationally recognised qualification in order to ensure, for example, the effective use of SEN funding. The leader has a good understanding of the progress made by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in reading, writing and mathematics. She frequently monitors the quality of work of the teaching assistants who are working alongside pupils. There are good links with outside agencies, for example the local authority inclusion team. Assessment information provided by the school suggests that the majority of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are currently making much better progress than has previously been the case.

Leaders have ensured that the quality of communication and engagement with parents has improved. Parents with whom inspectors spoke stated that the frequent newsletters and informative website keep them up to date with essential information. For example, key dates, governor news, sporting successes and general reminders are easily accessible. Termly newsletters sent home by teachers inform parents of the upcoming topics and subjects to be taught each term. Senior leaders are present at the start and end of the school day to talk to parents as they arrive and leave. As a result, parents have a better understanding of what is happening at the school.

The implementation and evaluation of the sports premium funding is effective. The leader has ensured that staff have received appropriate training to deliver the new physical education curriculum. Pupils have frequent opportunities to compete against each other and against pupils from other schools. Olympic athletes have

visited the school and deepened pupils' understanding of how to lead healthier lifestyles.

The leader responsible for implementing and evaluating the pupil premium strategy has a good understanding of the attainment and progress made by disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Current assessment information provided by the school and inspection evidence suggest that the majority of disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress than was previously the case. However, the leader is less clear regarding the extra support given to the most able disadvantaged pupils and disadvantaged pupils who are in the early years.

The principal is supported well by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable leadership team. The temporary acting principal and temporary acting deputy principal have continued to move the school forward during the principal's absence in the spring term. Subject leaders have developed their confidence, for example in discussing pupils' progress and attainment information. The English and mathematics leaders have produced appropriate action plans and are developing the relationship with the link governor. Consequently, governors on the academy advisory board are now holding leaders to account more rigorously for the actions they take.

Governors on the academy advisory board have received relevant training, for example in safeguarding and understanding pupils' achievement information. They possess a good mix of skills and experience that enables them to discharge their duties effectively. Minutes of board meetings show that governors ask appropriate questions and are starting to offer a good level of challenge and support to leaders. Governors are beginning to visit the school to check on the progress of the school improvement plan. For example, a recent visit by the mathematics governor identified a link between pupils' punctuality and rates of progress. After such visits, reports are written and the findings shared with other governors at meetings. As a result, other governors are kept up to speed with the strengths and development areas at the school.

Leaders have strengthened strategies successfully to improve pupils' reading skills and enjoyment of reading. For example, classes now have their own reading corners. The school library has been updated and two visits from authors have encouraged pupils to read more widely and often. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy reading, have plenty of books to choose from and like the whole-class reading books. Teachers provide pupils with frequent opportunities to develop comprehension skills through 'rainbow reading'. In this, pupils develop inference and deduction skills, for example through answering questions from a text or empathising with a particular character in a story.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially the most able pupils. Teachers are also planning activities that challenge pupils. For

example, in a Year 5 and Year 6 class, pupils were enjoying solving problems relating to the relationship between the radius and diameter of a circle. Teachers are also dealing promptly with pupils' misconceptions. For example, in a Year 3 and 4 mathematics class, the teacher quickly reminded pupils that they did not need to write both the '£' and 'p' symbols when writing amounts of money.

Teaching assistants support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities well. This is because teaching assistants have received appropriate training and because teachers plan for them in order to support learning effectively in classes. Teaching assistants understand the importance of allowing pupils to complete some activities on their own, which promotes pupils' independence.

Teachers are providing pupils in key stage 1 with increased opportunities to develop spelling, punctuation and grammar skills through extended writing. Pupils' workbooks show a wide variety of extended writing, including letters, diary entries and factual reports. One Year 2 pupil, when empathising with a polar bear, sensitively wrote, 'I am feeling confused because my ice is melting.'

Teachers are using a consistent approach to assess pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Frequent opportunities are available for teachers to discuss pupils' achievements with senior leaders. Consequently, any pupil who is falling behind is identified swiftly and given the help they need to catch up.

In the early years, relationships between children and adults are positive. Teachers provide a wide variety of opportunities for children to be creative and develop number and writing skills. Children make particularly good progress in writing. For example, one child who was mark-making in September had recently written, 'Chloe glimpsed at the food as she munched it up.' Senior leaders and the early years leader agree that the outdoor area is in need of improvement if it is to match the quality of the indoor provision.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have developed strategies to support pupils at risk of exclusion. For example, there has been an increase in the school's use of outside agencies, including the educational psychologist, play therapy workers and the specialist support service. Leaders have also organised a cluster group with local schools to help share good practice and resources, as well as securing extra funding for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. As a result of this work, a number of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion are now successfully attending school and the proportion of fixed-term exclusions has dramatically reduced. However, leaders acknowledge that, despite their best efforts, a small number of pupils have been permanently excluded during the academic year.

Leaders have provided pupils with numerous opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities. For example, 'school ambassadors' show visitors and prospective parents around the school. 'Lunchtime buddies' and the 'sports crew' promote good behaviour and exercise during breaktimes. 'Change 4 life ambassadors' have received training to help support pupils' healthy eating and promote healthy lifestyles. The democratically elected 'pupil forum' meets frequently with leaders to discuss areas of the school that could be improved. Most recently, the forum has liaised with school leaders to purchase new play equipment for use at lunchtimes. Pupils told me that they enjoyed these roles and took the added responsibilities seriously.

A new behaviour system has been introduced successfully. This involves a series of rewards and sanctions being consistently used in all classrooms. As a result, the number of behavioural incidents has reduced by half and the number of pupils involved in these incidents has reduced by a third. Pupils told me that any incidents of poor behaviour and bullying were rare and that, if any did occur, adults would deal with them quickly and fairly.

The school's ethos of 'Positivity, Respect, Integrity, Determination and Excellence' – PRIDE – is evident in classrooms, corridors and in pupils' workbooks. Staff actively promote these values, and pupils with whom I spoke could explain them to me. The new school house and points system gives pupils an increased understanding of pride, identity and responsibility. Pupils from the winning house are rewarded frequently for their consistent hard work, good manners and behaviour.

Leaders have updated the school's curriculum with a new religious education syllabus. This has ensured that pupils are learning about those people who have a faith or culture different from their own. For example, recent celebrations of Chinese New Year and Diwali and visitors from the Hindu and Sikh faiths have helped to deepen pupils' understanding of these faiths. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have deepened their understanding of the British justice system by having a visit from a local magistrate. Pupils are therefore now better prepared for life in modern Britain.

Outcomes for pupils

There have not been any end of key stage tests, Year 1 phonics screening checks or good level of development results in Reception since the last inspection. The school's new assessment system allows leaders and teachers to track carefully the attainment and progress made by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Current information provided by the school suggests that the majority of pupils are on track to be working at expectations for their age by the end of the academic year. The vast majority of pupils are now making good, and sometimes very good, progress from their various starting points. The vast majority of the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are now making faster progress than previously. However, leaders are aware that standards in writing are still too low.

External support

The Education Fellowship Trust has provided leaders with good support and training in safeguarding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and pupils who speak English as an additional language. The trust has been instrumental in organising local cluster groups so that teachers can share good practice and moderate pupils' work with colleagues from other schools. Northamptonshire County Council has provided effective support for pupils who require pastoral support, have behavioural difficulties and are at risk of exclusion.