

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 September 2017

Miss Kerry Mills
Risdene Academy
Newton Road
Rushden
Northamptonshire
NN10 0HH

Dear Miss Mills

Special measures monitoring inspection of Risdene Academy

Following my visit, to your school on 11 to 12 July 2017, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2017.

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

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Nuttall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- 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 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 special educational needs 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 special educational needs 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 senior 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 first monitoring inspection on 11 July 2017 to 12 July 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and met with: the principal and vice-principal; three members from the academy advisory board, which included the chair, the vice-chair and a parent governor; two members of the Fellowship Education Support Team; newly appointed leaders at the end of the summer term responsible for English, mathematics, and special educational needs; and a group of pupils from key stages 1 and 2. The inspector spoke to parents at the beginning of the day. The inspector visited every class, evaluated pupils' work and listened to pupils read. The statement of action, the school improvement plan and the English and mathematics subject action plans were evaluated. The inspector considered the school's most recent progress and attainment information of pupils. Documentation relating to behaviour and arrangements for safeguarding pupils were also considered. The inspector also scrutinised: information relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning; documentation about the external review of pupil premium funding; minutes from the academy advisory board meetings; and information relating to pupil premium funding.

Context

The current principal has been in post since September 2016, following the resignation of the previous principal, vice-principal and seven teachers. The trust swiftly appointed a new vice-principal; however, she left at the end of the autumn term after long-term absence. In January 2017, an interim senior leader was appointed temporarily from within the trust to work alongside the principal until the school appointed a vice-principal.

In February 2017, although interviews were conducted, the principal was unable to appoint a vice-principal. As a result, the interim senior leader has remained at the school and taken on the responsibilities of vice-principal.

The previous mathematics leader resigned her post in August 2016. The principal has since taken on this leadership role.

The school has faced considerable difficulties trying to recruit teachers within the academic year and has relied upon temporary teachers. Some of these have now become permanent teachers at the school. From September 2017, the school has a full complement of teaching staff, including new appointments for mathematics and English leaders.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The current principal and senior leaders, including representatives of the academy advisory board and representatives of the trust, have not taken effective action since the Ofsted inspection in January 2017. Consequently, too many pupils are not making the progress they should and the school is not improving rapidly enough.

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. Leaders have evaluated the impact of staffing instability upon the school's assessment information. They know that pupil assessment information is not as reliable as it should be.

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. However, the impact of the training has not yet been fully evaluated by the leaders to ensure that it is meeting the specific needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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. In September 2017, parents will be invited to share reading activities with their child once a week. The principal knows there is further work to be done in this area.

The trust commissioned a pupil premium funding review in May 2017 to ensure that the allocation of funding is improving the provision for disadvantaged pupils. The provision for this particular group is inconsistent as a result of weak teaching and staffing instability over the year. There is little evidence of the impact of the work of the school in helping disadvantaged pupils to achieve well.

The sport premium spending has had greater 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.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

As a result of staffing instability, leaders have not been able to improve the quality of teaching across the school to accelerate the progress of pupils in mathematics, reading, writing and science. Therefore, teaching continues to be inconsistent and pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

In most classes, the most able pupils are not routinely challenged because tasks are too easy. In addition, teachers do not check on pupils' learning often enough to identify and deal with their misconceptions. Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they found the work too easy.

Pupils' workbooks show that teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to practise their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics. The most able pupils, in particular, are not challenged strongly enough. The principal recognises that this is a key area of development.

Where teaching is ineffective, teachers do not consistently provide appropriate learning activities for the most pupils to meet their specific needs. Pupils are provided with activities that are either too easy or too hard. This means that pupils become less engaged in their learning, which leads to low-level disruption.

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 were able to 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. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this new initiative on pupils' outcomes.

Teachers' assessment practices are not yet reliable. Turbulent staffing has not enabled leaders to satisfactorily address this area and ensure that assessment practices are secure.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

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

Leaders recognise that reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions is an area for improvement. Senior leaders, the leader responsible for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the inclusion team work together well to ensure that there is effective provision in place. Where necessary, pupils attend alternative provision. There is daily communication between the school and alternative providers to ensure that pupils' needs are being met. Outreach workers from alternative providers also work with the school's staff, ensuring that there is a consistent approach to managing pupils' specific emotional and behavioural needs when pupils attend the school. The school receives higher needs funding to ensure that there is effective provision in place for particular pupils. Leaders are tenacious in their approach to ensuring that pupils who need specialised provision have their needs met well.

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 breaktimes. 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 are able to 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.

Outcomes for pupils

Recent school information shows the proportion of children attaining a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year is lower than last year's national average. Disadvantaged children do not attain as well as other children nationally in the early years. Early years children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make the progress of which they are capable. A significant number of this group have acute needs that are being managed by a range of external agencies.

The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has declined between 2016 and 2017.

Pupils at the end of Year 2 have not made good progress during their time in key stage 1. Standards of attainment at the end of key stage 1 are not rising quickly enough.

At the end of key stage 2, pupils' outcomes in the statutory tests are similar to last year's school results in reading and mathematics. However, the attainment for writing has fallen. Disadvantaged pupils have not attained well this year; they are significantly behind the attainment of other pupils nationally, particularly in writing.

Teachers are making assessments of pupils' learning and have had some opportunity to moderate their judgements with other schools locally and within the trust. However, leaders are not yet confident that all teachers' judgements are secure.

Pupils' workbooks show that progress is hampered where teaching is less effective across the school. Leaders acknowledge that a stable staffing structure and greater leadership capacity in the forthcoming year will help to improve outcomes for pupils.

External support

The Education Fellowship Trust has not been effective in supporting the school. It has fallen short of its duty to ensure that the urgent improvements needed for pupils take place. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning have been inadequate for some time.

The trust has seconded a senior leader from within the trust to initially support the principal as a result of the resignation of the previous vice-principal. However, this role has since changed and the senior leader, since January, has taken up the role as vice-principal. She has ably assisted the principal by providing greater leadership capacity so that leaders are able to tackle decisively the areas for improvement.

The trust has arranged support from the trust's leader for welfare, inclusion and special educational needs and/or disabilities. She has been instrumental in securing improved welfare and provision for vulnerable pupils through the training and development of staff at the school.

Northamptonshire County Council has provided additional support for the early years team to help improve their provision. This support has been well received by the school and its staff. As a result, where pupils have required alternative provision, the school and Northamptonshire County Council have worked together to meet the specific needs of these pupils.

The school works closely with Northamptonshire County Council inclusion team to secure better outcomes and provision for vulnerable pupils, particularly for those requiring alternative provision.