

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Andrew Sears
Principal
Risdene Academy
Newton Road
Rushden
Northamptonshire
NN10 0HH

Dear Mr Sears

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Risdene Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 April 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school 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, the academy advisory board and the Education Fellowship Trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Senior leaders, the academy advisory board and the Education Fellowship Trust should take further action to:

- undertake an external review of governance and ensure that appropriate committee structures are in place
- ensure that school improvement planning is focused on the critical actions now needed and contains milestones that can be closely monitored by the academy advisory board
- ensure that an appropriate curriculum is in place and that teachers' knowledge and understanding of what pupils can achieve in each year group are further improved so that they can be properly ambitious for their pupils
- ensure that the quality of teaching rapidly improves in those remaining classes where pupils make insufficient progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant principal, representatives from the trust and two members of the academy advisory board to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I evaluated the school development planning documents and the school's self-evaluation summary. Together, we visited every class and observed pupils' learning. I spoke with pupils and looked at the work in their books. I met formally with a group of Year 6 pupils.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection conducted in June 2015, three members of the teaching staff have left the school. You have appointed two temporary key stage leaders and a pupil premium champion. These are internal appointments.

Main findings

Leaders have undertaken an external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding. The vice-principal has acted quickly to address the findings from this review. Leaders now have reliable information about the progress that disadvantaged pupils make within lessons and are making good use of this information. They have adapted the curriculum to make sure that disadvantaged pupils receive focused help to improve their skills, particularly in writing. As a result, disadvantaged pupils in particular are making accelerated progress.

Teachers mark pupils' books regularly. The feedback they give is helpful to pupils. Leaders have made sure that marking is consistent. The quality of work that some pupils produce, however, still needs to improve. Too many teachers are not pushing pupils to do their very best. When we looked at pupils' work in books, we saw many examples where the teachers' expectations of what a pupil could achieve were too low.

The leader of the early years provision is highly experienced, and her determination in addressing the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection has borne fruit. Early years leaders' information gathered from lesson observations, scrutiny of work and external moderation provides evidence that the quality of teaching has improved and that children are making progress. Leaders predict that the number of children reaching a good level of development will be above the national average in 2016. We discussed the planned activities in place to promote the interest and engagement of boys and saw the 'space mission' in action. Children enjoy their learning within the early years. The trust has rightly recognised the leadership skill of the early years leader and plans are in place for her to take part in school-to-school support.

Local governance of the school is by the academy advisory board. An external review of governance has not taken place because you felt it important to recruit new members to the academy advisory board before a review happens. The academy advisory board now has an appropriately skilled, enthusiastic and committed membership. However, the board is unable to hold school leaders to account because it does not have appropriate committee structures and processes in place.

Across the school as a whole, the quality of teaching is inconsistent and is not yet good in all classes. We saw teaching that was insufficiently challenging and we saw some pupils not making the progress that they should. Leaders have developed a programme of coaching and your evidence suggests that the quality of some teaching has improved as a result. This small measure of improvement is not good enough, and more focused and urgent action is required. Your information on the progress that pupils make shows clearly that pupils' progress has improved, particularly in early years and Year 6, but it is not yet good enough in Year 3 and Year 5.

There is some school improvement planning in place. You have adopted the trust's approach to documentation on the advice of the academy outcomes director. Planning is not precise enough. Too often, paperwork that has taken a great deal of time to produce has had no impact. Currently, the academy advisory board cannot effectively hold leaders to account because your improvement planning is weak and your plans do not identify the critical actions needed, or the milestones that you intend to reach.

External support

The school is part of the Education Fellowship Trust. The trust has facilitated a range of leadership development opportunities for you, including good practice visits to schools outside the trust and networks within the trust. You feel that you have benefited from these opportunities. You are now a more visible presence around the school.

Plans are in place to provide further training and development for middle leaders. The trust has accurately identified that these leaders have an important role to play in improving the quality of curriculum and teaching. The trust plans to enable three leaders from within the trust to join the school in order that further leadership coaching and development can take place on a daily basis.

Since September 2015, leaders have received intensive support and challenge from the academy outcomes director. Leaders have appreciated this support. This support, however, has not been effective in making sure improvement planning is fit for purpose.

The Education Fellowship Trust does not measure effectively the impact of its work.

The school is part of the Higham Ferrers and Rushton cluster of schools. This local network has helped subject leaders to conduct external subject moderation and improve assessment.

I intend to conduct a further visit to the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of 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