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Mrs Angela Watts
Principal
Ruskin Academy
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Dear Mrs Watts

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ruskin Academy

Following my visit to your school on 7 and 8 March, 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 July 2016.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose. The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy advisory board of the Education Fellowship Trust, the chair 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

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2016

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - ensuring that all leaders have clear roles and responsibilities to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
 - training senior and middle leaders to lead improvements in their areas of responsibility to raise standards
 - ensuring that the appraisal process for teachers contains precise actions and targets which support the improvement of teaching and learning
 - tracking the progress made by disadvantaged pupils more closely in order to evaluate the effectiveness of pupil premium expenditure
 - tracking the progress of the most able pupils to ensure that this group of pupils makes good progress
 - developing a curriculum which will enable the pupils to learn and embed key skills for reading, mathematics and science
 - strengthening governors' skills in holding senior leaders to account
 - analysing the effectiveness of the sports premium funding by checking whether more pupils are attending extra-curricular sporting clubs and that the school is delivering high-quality PE lessons
 - working closely with parents to increase their confidence in the work of the school.

- Improve the behaviour and personal development of pupils by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of how pupils should behave and apply the school's behaviour policy consistently
 - ensuring that all incidents of alleged bullying are recorded to enable more staff to be aware of any potential issues and resolve them as quickly as possible
 - working with external agencies more effectively to reduce the number of exclusions
 - raising awareness of the importance of high attendance and punctuality among parents and pupils to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils in particular, and the punctuality of the minority of pupils who do not arrive at school on time
 - teaching the pupils how to be successful learners and how this quality can be demonstrated.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards by:
 - ensuring that all teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve

- providing opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts
- developing pupils’ mental arithmetic skills and improving their understanding of mathematics
- setting work at the appropriate level for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to enable them to make good progress from their starting points
- challenging the most able pupils to enable them to reach their full potential
- improving pupils’ ability to spell by ensuring that pupils know spelling rules and have a secure knowledge of how to spell high-frequency words
- providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their inference skills when reading
- increasing the opportunities for pupils to plan scientific investigations, record their results and write conclusions.

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 March 2017

Evidence

The Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other members of the school's senior leadership team and the subject leaders for science and for physical education (PE). The inspectors met with the chair of the academy advisory board, which performs much of the role of a governing body, along with a representative of the multi-academy trust. The inspector spoke with parents and pupils. He observed teaching in all year groups in the school. In total, he observed learning in eight lessons, including three observed jointly with the principal. The inspectors scrutinised pupils' work; checked that the school's website complies with national guidance on what academies should publish; examined the school's single central register; as well as checked that staff were well trained in safeguarding and knew the procedure to report. Inspectors also evaluated the school's self-evaluation documentation, along with the action plan.

Context

Following the last inspection, a high proportion of staff left at the end of the summer term 2016, along with the previous principal. The current principal has been in post since September 2016. She has created a new leadership team, comprising the assistant principal for the delivery of the curriculum, a director of inclusion, a director of teaching and learning and a lead teacher for teacher development. Around 80% of teachers are new to the school. However, leaders continue to face considerable difficulties in recruiting staff.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new principal is improving the school considerably. She is making her expectations clear to all staff, and has quickly earned their respect, along with that of pupils and parents. Staff are becoming a more united team with promising signs of an increasingly collaborative approach. There is a clear sense from everyone that the school is moving forward. This is because the principal has constructed a new senior leadership team, whose members are modelling effectively the approaches and new systems she wants to see in place universally. All senior leaders have a clear understanding of the challenges needed to drive up standards. They know that it is their role to ensure that pupils who leave Ruskin Academy are well prepared for secondary school. Both they and middle leaders have clear roles and responsibilities. They are receiving training and support to undertake their roles effectively and to drive up the quality of teaching. For example, the new inclusion manager is undertaking nationally accredited training for his role, and other members of staff

have been supported by an experienced headteacher from another school within the multi-academy trust.

Leaders' process for appraising the quality of staff is now more effective. The targets that leaders are setting with teachers are both specific and are closely linked to improving teachers' performance in the classroom. Leaders can now measure success, along with specific dates for the completion of each target. Most of these targets are linked closely to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Although details are brief, leaders note the development needs of each teacher and the support that leaders will provide for them. Leaders are also taking note of teachers' strengths as well as those areas in which each teacher needs to improve. Leaders are now also managing the performance of teaching assistants in a similar way, in order that they too can become more effective in their roles.

The school's new tracking system to record pupils' attainment and progress is in its infancy. It shows the proportions of pupils who are meeting the typical expectations for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. This data indicates that there is a clear, early improvement in pupils' skills since the beginning of the academic year. This improvement includes the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in most year groups. However, leaders have not entered information for pupils of different ability groups, and so it does not yet allow them to track, for example, the progress of the most able pupils. Published information from 2016 shows that this group made significantly less progress in English, mathematics and science when compared with similar pupils nationally. Leaders expect that effective tracking of the most able pupils will be in place by the end of this term. They then plan to give the information to members of the academy advisory board, so that its members can see where these pupils' gains are not fast enough, and challenge leaders to improve them. Leaders have taken the sensible decision to gather assessment information for mathematics, reading and writing first. They have not begun to track pupils' progress in, for example, science, or in other subjects across the curriculum, but are mindful of the need to do so once the current system is fully in place.

The pupil premium review, which the school commissioned last term, showed that the funding was not spent appropriately in the previous academic year. Because disadvantaged pupils were not effectively supported during this time, they made significantly slower progress than other pupils did nationally in both reading and mathematics. Leaders have written a new strategy for spending the school's pupil premium funding. It aims to meet pupils' emotional needs alongside providing additional academic support in English and mathematics. The strategy is broadly fit for purpose because it makes clear the barriers to learning for many of these pupils, as well as how leaders will judge the success of spending. It does not take sufficient account of supporting the most able pupils, however, and it does not set out targets

for increasing the proportions of these pupils to attain a greater depth of understanding.

Senior leaders have put in place a curriculum that is helping pupils to learn more quickly and to acquire greater skills in reading, mathematics and science. The curriculum is based on a series of interesting themes, such as 'Poles Apart' in Year 3 and 'War Game' in Year 5. Teachers ensure that each topic has at least one exciting trip or visit to enthuse pupils in their work. For example, pupils in Year 6 visited Warwick Castle to learn about life and culture in the middle ages. The curriculum also gives pupils opportunities to demonstrate their skills in non-academic areas. For example, during the inspection, members of the school choir performed at Wembley Arena in the 'Voice in a Million' performance. Upon their return, they were very keen to tell others how much they enjoyed the experience, and explained how it had helped them to improve their confidence in themselves.

The capacity of the academy advisory board to undertake its role effectively is currently limited. That is because it has too few members to perform its function effectively. For this reason, leaders have chosen to delay the review of governance that inspectors recommended at the last inspection until more board members can be recruited. Board members are committed to the school and are beginning to receive better information about the progress that pupils are making. They are also challenging leaders more effectively on the data that they are given. However, they do not yet check effectively that leaders are analysing the impact of their spending of the pupil premium. Board members cannot be sure which services, support and resources purchased are proving to be the most effective and identify any that are not. The impact of the board is further constrained by the fact that they do not yet receive information in a timely manner. The principal currently presents data about pupils' attainment and progress and other information at board meetings only. As a result, board members have neither sufficient time in advance to digest this information nor the opportunity to consider together the best questions to pose to leaders in order to hold them to account rigorously.

In the previous academic year, leaders did not spend the primary physical education (PE) and sport funding effectively and, as a result, pupils' participation and enjoyment did not increase sufficiently. The new coordinator of PE has improved the spending of this funding considerably. A new scheme of work to improve teaching has been purchased and pupils are attending increasing numbers of sporting festivals and competitions, such as athletics, tag rugby, basketball and football. The new coordinator of PE plans further competitions for later this term in hockey, netball, cross-country and in boccia. The coordinator is tracking pupils' participation in sporting clubs carefully to ensure that all pupils, and particularly disadvantaged pupils, attend clubs regularly.

Parents who the inspector met were very positive about the improvements that the new principal and the leadership team are making. They explained that, as a result of her work, the quality of teaching is improving and that their children are beginning to make faster progress. These positive comments reflect the much more positive responses found on Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. In the last school year, only 13% of those parents who submitted their views said that they would recommend the school to others, and less than 10% said that the school was well led and managed. Results from this school year show that 75% of parents who responded would now recommend the school, and over 91% of parents think that the school's leadership is good. This is because leaders are working much more closely with parents, which is increasing parents' confidence. Parents are now being encouraged to take a much more active part in school events, such as coming to watch class assemblies and accompanying their children on school trips. A majority of parents are now attending parents' evenings and are receiving good information on the progress their child is making. Parents say that they feel better informed about school life, as staff email them regular newsletters and send them useful text messages.

Safeguarding is effective. Staff have been appropriately trained in safeguarding issues, including in areas of recent national concern, such as extremism. Staff were able to describe the different signs that might suggest that a pupil is being harmed, or is at risk. They understand both the procedures to report and their responsibility to do so without delay. Staff share information about vulnerable pupils regularly so that they are aware of any difficulties, issues or incidents. The designated leaders responsible for safeguarding check the care and welfare of these pupils well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Teachers' overall expectations of pupils' behaviour have improved considerably. The new behaviour policy is making it very clear to everyone, including the pupils themselves, the consequences of both good and of unacceptable behaviour. It makes clear that staff must note, encourage and reward those pupils who behave well. Pupils who met the inspector said that everyone likes the school's system of awarding points for their behaviour because they know that as well as accumulating them for good behaviour, staff can deduct points if pupils misbehave. They said that they can approach an adult in school to help them if they are worried about something. They confirmed that while bullying and name-calling persist, these are now infrequent. Leaders now record properly any incidents of alleged bullying, and they share information with colleagues regularly so that staff are aware of any issues. Parents who spoke to the inspector also explained how their children now feel safe in school. Pupils say that although the overall management of pupils' behaviour has improved considerably, some inconsistency in how adults apply the

rules continues. Pupils would like to see every staff member apply the rules in a similar way. Teachers' higher expectations do not yet extend to how pupils should complete their work. Too often, teachers do not insist that pupils write neatly, and fail to do anything about scribbled, untidy and hurried work they receive.

Leaders have reduced greatly the number of exclusions. Staff explained to the inspector that, historically, parents were often asked to collect their child during the day after he or she had misbehaved and yet this was not always recorded as an exclusion. Current leaders are ensuring that all exclusions are logged appropriately, with clear reasons recorded. They are reluctant to exclude any pupil unless the exclusion is fully justified. The number of recorded exclusions this year has been halved, and the proportion of repeat exclusions is also falling considerably. The school has employed a part-time counsellor whose role includes working with pupils whose behaviour means that they are at risk of exclusion. Leaders have also used external agencies to support pupils who find it hardest to manage their own behaviour.

Absence, while remaining above the national average, is falling. Leaders have made clear to all parents the need for all pupils to be in school unless there is a genuine or exceptional reason for not attending. Leaders explain that good attendance is not just a legal requirement but is essential to ensure their child's progress. Where a pupil's attendance begins to fall, leaders monitor this closely and take prompt action to ensure that the pupil attends more regularly. Pupils who spoke to the inspector told him how they like coming to school to learn, and how they and their friends try to win the trophy that the principal awards to the class with the highest attendance.

School leaders are ensuring that staff are improving pupils' resilience. Staff promote good behaviour through a series of five statements named '#TeamRuskinRules', which are displayed prominently throughout the school. These are: be proud; take responsibilities; show respect; be safe; and bounce back. Staff are teaching pupils more effectively how to deal with frustration, and how not to become upset if they get something wrong. Pupils who the inspector met confirmed that staff now help them to understand that making a small number of mistakes can be useful in showing them what they do not yet understand.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The modelling by senior leaders of higher expectations of what pupils can achieve is beginning to drive up the quality of teaching. Leaders are ensuring that staff meet regularly to check the accuracy of their assessment of pupils' work alongside the expectations for typical pupils of the same ages. This is helping staff to realise that they need to plan challenging work for pupils of different abilities and expect all

pupils to complete good amounts of it. Leaders have shown teachers how they can assess pupils' work more effectively, as well as the importance of looking to see which groups of pupils have made the slowest progress, and why. In addition, leaders are making it clear to all teachers that additional support is only there to help pupils who have fallen behind, or have specific needs, and must not be used to compensate for poor teaching. Those teachers who are new to the profession feel strongly that senior leaders are giving them good levels of support. They say that they can approach other, more experienced, members of staff for advice. They have not yet, however, had the opportunity to see highly effective teaching in other schools.

Pupils' books that the inspector looked at during his visit confirm that there are early signs of better progress for pupils in mathematics. For example, pupils in Year 3 have learned to halve numbers accurately, while pupils in Year 4 understand the difference between perimeter and area. Pupils throughout the school are grasping mathematical concepts such as fractions. Improvements in teaching of mental arithmetic strategies are also noticeable. Leaders ensure that staff are providing regular time for mental skills within the curriculum, and pupils say that they are expected to learn their multiplication tables. Workbooks show clearly, however, that teachers throughout the school plan too few opportunities for pupils to apply their skills through problem-solving. In addition, teachers do not give them tasks where they are required to explain their reasoning clearly and logically in a written form. As a result, pupils are not making fast enough progress.

Teachers are now setting work for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities that is more appropriate to their needs. Leaders are checking that work that teachers plan for these pupils is suitable. They are both writing at greater length and completing mathematics work in number and calculation with more confidence. Leaders are aware, however, that they are in the early stages of fully effective provision for this group of pupils. Though some staff have received valuable training on areas such as autistic spectrum disorder, leaders explained that there are a considerable number of pupils within the school whose needs have not yet been formally assessed. The new director of inclusion is making the coordination of support for these pupils one of his priorities. Leaders are clear, however, that the ultimate responsibility for the provision of this group of pupils remains with each class teacher and that any support given to a pupil must be with the clear aim of improving his or her independence over time.

The most able pupils are beginning to receive more work that is more suitable to their ability. These pupils are, on occasions, given access to some of the content taught in an older year group and given tasks of additional challenge, as well as being expected to learn spellings at home that are more difficult. Leaders have

purchased books that allow pupils to access texts that will deepen and extend their thinking. These pupils say that they would like still greater access to a wider range of challenging texts to choose from, as well as opportunities in class to read for a sustained period.

Along with an impressive improvement in pupils' use of ambitious vocabulary since the start of the academic year, pupils' spelling ability has begun to develop. Although it is not yet sufficiently good to allow pupils to write consistently to a high standard, pupils are developing the ability to spell and use more words when they write. Pupils now know an increasing proportion of the words that they should be familiar with. A considerable number of teachers are failing to insist that pupils correct basic errors, however, and this is hampering pupils' improvement in spelling. As a result, pupils continue to make the same mistakes in subsequent pieces of work. In some instances, the inspector noted that teachers had marked an answer as correct even though there was a clear error in the pupil's spelling.

Staff are making it clear both to pupils and to their parents that reading is important for pupils' future success. Regular information in newsletters and school-wide challenges for each child to read as often as possible at home are increasing pupils' excitement of reading. A large majority of the pupils that the inspector met told him that they enjoyed reading, and could name several of their favourite authors. In addition, teachers now ensure that they provide daily opportunities for pupils to read, and will discuss the skill of reading at any point in English lessons, rather than limit this to opportunities when pupils are actively reading books. Leaders are ensuring that pupils are developing better skills to infer meaning from texts when they read. Although the inspector noted that pupils in Year 3 could not fluently describe what the skill of inference was, they nevertheless demonstrated convincingly that they could identify clues from a text or picture to draw accurate conclusions.

Leaders are ensuring that teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to conduct scientific investigations. The subject leader for science checks that teachers plan for their class to have at least a day each half term when they will investigate something scientifically, thinking and recording for themselves. For example, pupils in Year 3 have looked at how they can prevent an igloo from melting, while pupils in Year 5 investigated which surface is the best for vehicles to travel on. Leaders agree, however, that pupils need still more opportunities to investigate before their skills in doing this independently are secure.

External support

The school has received support from the multi-academy trust before and since the last inspection. This has allowed leaders to plan improvement actions more effectively and ensure that leaders are clear on the impact they want, as well as the timescales. The trust have also assisted leaders' work to focus on specific groups of pupils, such as pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or the most able pupils, so that the needs of these pupils can be more effectively met. The principal believes that the regular meetings with her colleagues in other schools within the trust have proved particularly effective in giving her advice and support in her role.