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Angela Watts
Principal
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Ruskin Avenue
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Dear Mrs Watts

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ruskin Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 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 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 July 2016. 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.

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 chair of the academy advisory board, 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 second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 July 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other members of the school's senior leadership team and the subject leader for physical education (PE). Inspectors met with the chair of the academy advisory board, which performs much of the role of a governing body, along with four representatives of the multi-academy trust. Inspectors spoke with parents, along with pupils in all year groups. They observed teaching in all year classes in the school. In total, they observed learning in ten lessons, along with four observed jointly with the principal. The inspectors scrutinised an extensive sample of pupils' work from all classes; checked that the school's website complies with national guidance on what academies should publish; examined the school's single central register; checked that staff appointed since the last monitoring visit were well trained in safeguarding and know the procedure to report any concerns. Inspectors also evaluated the school's self-evaluation documentation, along with the action plan.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the school has continued to suffer from turbulence in staffing, along with extensive difficulties in recruitment. The director of teaching and learning left the school at Easter.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new principal is continuing the trajectory of improvement at Ruskin Academy. She has sustained the respect of staff and pupils noted at the last monitoring visit. A majority of parents spoken to by inspectors during their visit, along with 94% of those parents who responded to parent view, believe that the school is being well led and managed. Staff continue to be an increasingly united team who have a sense of purpose and drive. A teacher whose classroom practice is particularly effective has been promoted to be the new director of teaching and learning from September. The principal has wasted no time in reassigning the responsibilities of this post to other senior leaders in this interim period. She has also appointed a teacher relatively new to the profession, but who shows clear potential, to the post of coordinator for English. The overall quality of teaching is improving. Several higher-level teaching assistants are currently teaching some classes. These staff are helping to ensure that pupils are making faster gains and providing a productive classroom environment where pupils can learn well. Senior leaders know that there remain classes where teaching is not improving as rapidly as they would wish. They are acutely aware of the need to focus upon these, so that higher expectations, and better teaching, is embedded in all classes. They understand fully the need to monitor closely and continually until they are assured that all the areas of weakness are being convincingly addressed.

Leaders' process for appraising the quality of staff is continuing to become more effective. Leaders have reviewed, alongside teachers, the progress against the targets that they agreed earlier in the year. These are linked to their classroom performance. Where appropriate, they also cover improving the effectiveness of any leadership role a staff member undertakes. The appraisal process is providing important evidence to leaders, and to the teachers themselves, that they are improving their skills. Targets continue to be specific and have clear dates for completion. At the time of the inspection, leaders had not yet reviewed the targets set for teaching assistants.

The school's new tracking system to record pupils' achievements is now showing a much greater degree of detail. It provides attainment data not only for pupils overall, but those of different groups, such as the most able pupils, those who are disadvantaged, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the performance of boys compared with girls. This is a considerable and useful improvement because it will now allow members of the academy advisory board to hold leaders to account for the slower progress of any group. Teachers are entering assessments that are, across almost all year groups, accurate. Leaders know this because teachers have met at length with colleagues from other schools across the academy to discuss the work of Ruskin's pupils and to check that their judgements are correct. In addition, external checking by the local authority of assessments in Year 6 confirmed their accuracy. Pupils leaving the school at the end of Year 6 last year made significantly less progress in English, mathematics and science when compared with similar pupils nationally. Attainment was also significantly below the national average. Unconfirmed information suggests that, this year, the proportions achieving the expected standards and those of greater depth will remain below the national average. However, attainment has risen by more than the national average in all areas, and particularly in mathematics. The proportion achieving the expected standard in writing is approaching the national average.

The pupil premium review, which took place in the autumn term, showed that the funding had not been spent appropriately in the previous academic year. Disadvantaged pupils were not effectively supported in their learning and, as a result, they made significantly slower progress than other pupils did nationally in mathematics and reading. Leaders' plan, revised as a result of the review, has been an improvement, because it meets the different emotional needs of disadvantaged pupils and provides them with additional academic support in English and mathematics. However, leaders are not currently sure which actions and support programmes are having the greatest impact. This means that the academy advisory board cannot be certain that leaders are spending all the funding as effectively as they might. In addition, although the most able pupils have benefitted overall from the support that leaders have provided, it still does not take sufficient account of their needs. Nevertheless, leaders have already begun work on writing a comprehensive plan for the next academic year. They intend for this to make clear the support that staff will provide for disadvantaged pupils of different abilities.

Senior leaders aim to also ensure that they are monitoring the effectiveness of each action stated. Pupils' workbooks confirm that, overall, disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress.

The curriculum continues to help pupils to learn more quickly and to acquire greater skills in reading, mathematics and science. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons and find them fun. Interesting topics, such as 'Up, Up and Away' in Year 4, allow pupils to learn about migrating birds and the history of flight, as well as making parachutes and kites in science. Year 5 pupils study climate zones and death masks of the pharaohs in 'Walk Like an Egyptian'. These topics also include increasing opportunities for cross-curricular work, such as writing an instructional leaflet to perform mummification.

The capacity of the academy advisory board to undertake its role effectively continues to be limited. At the last inspection, the inspector noted that the board chose to delay the recommended review of governance until more board members had been recruited. Despite strenuous efforts, the board have not been able to find additional members to help them to perform their function more effectively. They are now mindful of the need to ensure that the review is undertaken with urgency regardless. They have sourced several potential companies to do this so that the review can happen early next term. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the academy advisory board has shown promising signs of continued improvement. They have worked well with members of the multi-academy trust to improve their understanding of, for example, the needs of the most able children and those pupils who are disadvantaged. The trust has also provided them with useful questions to ask leaders about pupils' performance. Minutes of the academy advisory board show that they are now receiving better information about pupils' outcomes in advance of their meetings, and are holding leaders to account more effectively at their meetings.

The PE coordinator is continuing to see that the primary PE and sport funding is being effectively spent. Pupils' participation and enjoyment is continuing to increase, with around three-quarters of pupils having taken part in sporting competitions with other schools this year. Pupils who inspectors met with told them how they greatly enjoy these events. The new scheme of work for PE is continuing to improve the quality of teaching in this subject. The coordinator is also sustaining his close tracking of pupils' participation in sporting clubs so that leaders can be sure that all pupils, and particularly disadvantaged pupils, attend clubs regularly.

Parents whom the inspectors met continue to state that they approve of the principal and her leadership team, saying that they are approachable and that they ensure that their children are happy in school. Leaders also continue to welcome families into school regularly with, for example, highly and unanimously positive feedback received from parents following the special breakfast events on Father's Day and Mother's Day. As one parent stated, 'I thoroughly enjoyed coming. I was so glad to see so many people'. Inspectors saw Year 6 classes proudly rehearsing

an end-of-year performance for parents that will highlight their talents.

Safeguarding continues to be effective. Senior leaders give any new members of staff clear safeguarding information, and prompt training, when they begin. Staff continue to be effective at sharing information regarding any concerns they have about the welfare of pupils, and particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Because some parents who responded to parent view expressed the view that staff did not always deal with bullying effectively, inspectors looked very closely to check whether good procedures were in place to deal with any incidents. A thorough examination of school documentation shows that leaders systematically record all incidents of bullying and alleged misbehaviour. These records are of a consistently high quality. Leaders investigate any concerns thoroughly and fairly, in line with the school's robust complaints policy, which is available on the school's website. Where necessary, investigations are undertaken by the chair of the academy advisory board to ensure that they are independent of senior leaders.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils who inspectors met from all year groups in the school confirm that teachers are sustaining higher overall expectations of how pupils should behave. They continue to approve strongly of the school rules, and appreciate how staff celebrate pupils' good behaviour by awarding them team points. Pupils were very keen to explain to inspectors how any bullying and name-calling remain rare, and that staff deal with any incidents of potential unkindness fairly and promptly. Pupils said how, if something is worrying them, they can always approach a trusted adult in school who will help them. Leaders, teachers and support staff continue to strengthen pupils' resilience. Staff promote good attitudes to learning through the '#TeamRuskinRules' statements, which are displayed prominently throughout the school. Pupils who the inspector met once again explained how they do not mind making some mistakes as they learn.

Teachers' higher expectations of pupils' behaviour were seen in most classes that inspectors visited during the inspection. Here, inspectors observed pupils behaving well, and who were keen to learn from the interesting teaching they were given. It was clear that pupils were paying attention, cooperating with each other and were enthusiastic to share ideas. However, in a minority of classes, some of the tasks that pupils are asked to complete are undemanding. When this happens, pupils' attention wanders. In a very small minority of classrooms, poor behaviour from pupils continues to be tolerated by staff and, as a result, pupils learning is simply too slow. Leaders are fully aware of this remaining inconsistency in teachers' expectations and they are addressing it as a matter of urgency.

Leaders remain reluctant to exclude any pupil from school unless the exclusion is fully justified. They continue to record all exclusions, with clear written reasons for their actions that they pass on for scrutiny to the academy advisory board. Leaders have sustained their effective work with external agencies to assist pupils who find

it hardest to manage their own behaviour. The school's part-time counsellor continues to provide effective support for pupils who are at risk of exclusion. Though the number of exclusions remains higher than it should be, the proportion of these has more than halved this school year, and the proportion of repeat exclusions has fallen by two-thirds.

Pupils whom the inspectors met with told them how much they like coming to school each day, and how everyone competes to win the trophy for the class whose attendance is the highest. Overall punctuality has improved dramatically, and lateness is now negligible. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils who are now, in almost all cases, arriving in school on time. Information provided by the school shows that the proportion of these pupils currently in the school, and who are persistently absent, has fallen this year. However, the overall absence of disadvantaged pupils has continued to rise. Leaders agree that urgent action needs to begin immediately in order to reverse this trend. Newsletters, and the school website, give a clear message to all families that pupils must attend unless there are genuine reasons not to. Leaders continue to monitor absence closely and, where a pupil's absence begins to rise, leaders direct the family support worker to give support to his or her family. However, the action that the school takes is not currently proving effective enough in reducing the absence of sufficient disadvantaged pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Effective modelling by senior leaders of higher expectations of what pupils can achieve is continuing to drive up the overall quality of teaching. For example, pupils' books confirm that there are continuing signs of better teaching of mathematics, along with more evidence of problem solving. As well as an appropriate focus on mental arithmetic and number, pupils are learning a variety of mathematical skills. For instance, pupils in Year 3 have recently learned how to represent information using pictograms, while those in Year 5 are able to use a chart to convert currency in euros to pound sterling, as well as how to translate shapes with increasing accuracy. Pupils continue to confirm that teachers expect them to learn their multiplication tables as quickly as possible.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving considerably. The director of inclusion has now met with all teachers on an individual basis and has compiled an accurate and comprehensive register of these pupils, together with their needs. He has also constructed a useful and clear flowchart of the process of identification and support. This has allowed all staff to have a good understanding of how the needs of these pupils will now be addressed. Leaders are appointing additional staff members in September to enhance the support for these pupils in school. However, they continue to make it very clear to all staff that teachers retain the primary responsibility for the progress of these pupils. A scrutiny of work from pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in all year groups in the school shows that they are being given work

that is increasingly well matched and that, as a result, they are making faster progress.

The most able pupils overall are receiving increasing amounts of work that is more suitable to their ability. However, pupils' workbooks show that, in mathematics, many of them are not moved on quickly enough to work that will fully challenge their thinking. A number of pupils confirmed to inspectors that, though they are given the 'extraordinary challenges' to complete, teachers often first require them to complete work which is often too easy for them. At other times, although some of these pupils are given different work to others, it is often not sufficiently challenging. As a result, the progress of the most able pupils is still not quick enough in mathematics. This is less true in writing where, for example, expectations are a little higher, and teachers set the most able pupils spellings to learn at home that are more difficult.

Pupils are continuing to use a better and wider use of ambitious vocabulary when they write, and their spelling ability is continuing to develop. At the start of the current term, teachers began using a new commercial scheme for the teaching of reading and spelling. This is driving up the quality of spelling in the school and shows that pupils are, on a promising number of occasions, applying their better skills to their writing. However, although many pupils can now spell and use familiar words when they write, and a good proportion can spell some complex and unusual words, a minority of pupils continue to make unnecessary errors. This is because some teachers do not ensure that a pupil takes note of the guidance they have given them when he or she has made a mistake. As a result, these pupils continue to make the same errors in subsequent writing. While scrutinising pupils' work, inspectors also noted too many instances of teachers not upholding the guidelines of presentation they had previously agreed to adopt. Because of expectations that are still not consistently high enough across all classes, pupils' presentation does not yet reflect the aspirational culture that leaders are keen to create.

Staff continue to make clear to pupils and to their families that reading is crucially important to prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education, and for adult life. Newsletters give regular school-wide challenges for each child to read as often as possible at home. There are much-enjoyed rewards for the classes that do this most regularly. All the pupils who inspectors met told them how they liked to read very much. Teachers are continuing to ensure that they provide opportunities each day for pupils to read books. Leaders are also ensuring that pupils are developing better skills to infer meaning from texts when they read.

Pupils' increased opportunities to conduct scientific investigations have continued across the school. A scrutiny of pupils' work for this term shows that teachers are planning appropriate opportunities for prediction. Once pupils have undertaken their investigation, they are also required to record their results and to draw sensible conclusions from what they have found out. Inspectors noted, for example, how pupils in Year 4 had been learning about forces. They had constructed buggies from

wood and tested which ones would go the fastest. In contrast, pupils in Year 5 had written hypotheses on how they could best separate materials using different methods, before recording their results and writing postcards of their findings to tell Dr Who.

External support

In September 2016, the regional schools commissioner wrote to the members and trustees of the academy's sponsor, The Education Fellowship Trust (TEFT), due to its poor performance. In March 2017, the Department for Education agreed to a request from the trust to terminate their funding agreement for all 12 of their schools. As a result, all of them, including Ruskin Junior School, will be rebrokered by the regional schools commissioner. At the time of the inspection, the new sponsor had not been confirmed and, therefore, TEFT remains in place as the sponsor until that matter is resolved. The four members of the TEFT education support team have ensured that they have continued to give valuable advice to senior leaders and members of the academy advisory board on, for example, the effective teaching of spelling. They have also provided training for the board, undertaken quality assurance of the senior leadership team, and checked that leaders are addressing effectively the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The principal and chair of the board believe that the support team have been responsive to their requests and are helping to provide a smooth and orderly transition during the rebrokering process.