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5 October 2017

Mrs Jane Burton
Principal
Rushden Academy
Hayway
Rushden
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Dear Mrs Burton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Rushden Academy

Following my visit with Claire Shepherd and Sally Wicken, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 19 and 20 September 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.

The school's action plans are 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 chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and reduce the inconsistencies in teaching by:
 - reducing the number of supply teachers in the school
 - improving the support for the least able pupils, so that their progress accelerates
 - ensuring that all teachers provide feedback in line with the school's policy
 - ensuring that teaching in mathematics enables all pupils to develop skills of mastery and reasoning, so that they are better prepared for the next stage of their mathematics education
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills in different subjects.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - working with pupils to develop improved systems to address and reduce bullying in the school
 - working with leaders from the trust to improve pupils' attendance at school and reduce persistent absence
 - making sure that all teachers use the new behaviour system consistently across the school so that low-level disruption is eradicated and that all instances of disrespectful language and behaviour are consistently challenged
 - ensuring that all teachers insist on high standards of presentation of pupils' work.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the new assessment system is consistently applied in all subjects
 - ensuring that the new arrangements for pupils on part-time and alternative provision are effective in improving their attendance and progress
 - increasing opportunities for teachers to develop their practice by learning from expertise in the school, the trust and elsewhere.
- Improve the sixth form by:
 - increasing opportunities for all students to take part in work-related learning.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 September 2017 to 20 September 2017

Evidence

Inspectors met with the principal, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and a group of staff. Inspectors also met with a representative of the academy advisory board. Inspectors held meetings with two representatives of The Education Fellowship Trust and also spoke with the chief executive officer by telephone. Inspectors met formally with a group of pupils and spoke to others during the course of the two days, both in their lessons and around the school. Inspectors visited parts of 24 lessons, some with senior leaders, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses they observed. Inspectors looked at pupils' work in their lessons and in a sample of books taken from a range of subjects and year groups. Inspectors observed an assembly and visited pupils in their tutor group. A range of documents were scrutinised, including school improvement plans, safeguarding information, records relating to attendance and behaviour, and monitoring and evaluation records. Inspectors evaluated the impact of the actions that leaders have taken since the last monitoring inspection, with particular focus on the quality of leadership and management, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Context

In September 2016, the regional schools commissioner wrote to the members and trustees of the academy's sponsor, The Education Fellowship Trust (TEFT), with a termination warning notice concerning Rushden Academy 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 Rushden Academy, will be rebrokered by the regional schools commissioner. At the time of the monitoring inspection, the new sponsor had not been confirmed and, therefore, TEFT remains in place as the sponsor until that matter is resolved.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the chair of the academy advisory board has resigned and a replacement has not yet been elected. In July 2017, the principal left the school, as part of a predetermined plan, and the previous vice-principal was appointed as the new principal. In addition, one of the assistant principals has left the school and not been replaced. Three English teachers have left the school and have been replaced by two unqualified members of staff, currently following teacher training routes. In addition, a teacher of modern foreign languages has left. Leaders have appointed three permanent cover supervisors who took up their posts in September 2017. At the time of the monitoring inspection, the post of head of English was vacant.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal has successfully maintained the improvements seen at the last monitoring inspection. Staff report a 'seamless' transition of the principal taking up her new post. She is very ably supported by the vice-principal and other members of the senior leadership team. The senior leadership team has high visibility throughout the school. Pupils say that senior leaders are everywhere and staff feel utterly supported in all that they do. The 'Team Rushden' ethos continues to permeate through all aspects of the school. Staff morale is high and pupils are clear about the improvements that have been made and maintained since the inspection in July 2016. Pupils and staff feel that Rushden Academy is 'on the up'. There is a clear sense of collaboration and determination to improve further.

The principal undertakes close scrutiny of the work of the leadership team and others in the school. She meets leaders regularly to challenge and support their work and ensures that a clear focus on school improvement action plans is maintained. Regular review and evaluation mean that plans are amended and adapted appropriately and are effective in furthering improvement.

Staff recruitment is well managed. Leaders have maintained the 'grow your own' approach which is effective in ensuring that staff understand the school's values and vision. Induction processes for new staff are supportive and clearly communicate high expectations. Pupils recognise the increased stability in staffing and say that this has had a positive impact on their learning.

The leadership of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is strong. Leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school and are taking effective action to support staff to improve their practice.

Leadership of the sixth form is a strength of the school. At the time of the last monitoring inspection, leaders had taken effective action to provide increased opportunities for students to participate in work-related learning. They had also identified a desire to further improve this aspect of the school's work by ensuring that all work experience placements matched students' interests and needs. In the summer term of 2017, the vast majority of students undertook appropriate work experience. A small number of students were unable to participate at this time due to external examination commitments. Leaders have ensured that these students have been supported to secure placements at alternative times in the school year. In addition, plans are in place to extend this programme of activity further.

Much work has been undertaken to improve the impact of middle leadership, both on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and on pupils' outcomes. The principal has ensured that middle leaders are held to greater account by sharing high expectations alongside supporting them to develop their leadership, in turn holding their staff to greater account. For example, the principal has taken responsibility for the line management of the mathematics department. She holds

regular meetings with the head of department and the senior link, supporting their interpretation of assessment information and monitoring and evaluation activities. As a result of more rigorous monitoring, staff have a greater understanding of their responsibility for pupils' progress. This, alongside improvements to teaching, is beginning to improve the quality of education provided by the school. However, this work has not yet had a significant impact on pupils' outcomes. Leaders are aware of the need to maintain high accountability and continue to support the development of the middle leaders.

Following initial analysis of pupils' examination results in 2017, the principal has identified the need to review the curriculum to ensure that it best meets the needs of pupils. Plans are in place to take action as soon as possible.

At the time of the monitoring inspection, the post of the chair of the academy advisory board was vacant. This, combined with a lack of support from the trust, has meant that leaders have had to take responsibility for the governance of the school. Leaders are currently demonstrating the capacity to challenge their own work to drive improvements but they are very much in need of securing stability through a new chair and a new sponsor.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has continued to improve since the last monitoring inspection. However, it is inconsistent within and between subject areas and year groups. The 'teacher files', which had been introduced at the time of the last monitoring inspection, are now consistently shared and teachers understand the needs of individual pupils in their classes. Teachers now provide more opportunities to stretch the most able pupils. However, teachers do not routinely share high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. Some pupils, particularly those who are less motivated, do not always strive to achieve at the highest standard, for example by choosing an easier activity than their ability will allow. Leaders have identified the need to support teachers to plan to meet individuals' needs. Work has already begun to develop teachers' understanding and practice, for example through 'conference' training days and bespoke professional development activities.

At the time of the last monitoring inspection, leaders had introduced 'target time', a dedicated reflection activity designed to further pupils' learning. This approach is now more frequently followed. Where teaching is stronger, pupils respond to challenging activities which help them to develop their reasoning skills. Particularly strong practice was seen in pupils' BTEC sport and English books. This is not yet fully embedded throughout the school and thus remains a priority.

Teachers do not consistently follow the school's feedback policy, particularly with regard to literacy. Pupils are therefore not effectively supported to recognise literacy errors such as spellings, both of high frequency words and subject-specific

terminology. Leaders are aware that this needs urgent attention and have appointed a whole-school literacy lead to address this need.

An area for improvement identified at the inspection in July 2016 was to increase opportunities for pupils to practise their numeracy skills across the curriculum. The numeracy lead has responded to staff development needs by delivering whole-school training and offering additional follow-up support sessions. He has also reviewed the mathematics programme of study to ensure that pupils are taught these skills explicitly in mathematics lessons before they are expected to use them in other subject areas. Staff have been provided with a toolkit for teaching numeracy aspects of their subjects. At the time of the monitoring inspection, leaders were unable to assess the impact of this work but plans are in place to evaluate its impact on pupils' progress, both in mathematics and across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The improvements in behaviour have been maintained since the last monitoring inspection. The vice-principal continues to share very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and pupils respond positively. Pupils and staff maintain that behaviour has vastly improved. Staff are now more confident in following the school's behaviour policy and pupils report that there is greater consistency in its application. Pupils recognise the positive atmosphere that has been created and understand the importance of behaving well. As one pupil said, 'We're here to learn.' There are clearly established routines and pupils respond well to 'non-negotiables'. The last monitoring inspection noted that expectations of presentation were not consistently high. Leaders have introduced an RTP (ready to present) policy which shares expectations and routines regarding presentation. This has improved presentation for many pupils but the least able pupils are still not routinely expected to present their work to the highest possible standard.

The considerable work to tackle bullying that was evident at the last monitoring inspection has continued, with positive results. Pupils say that bullying continues to be rare and remain confident that staff would deal with it swiftly and effectively should it occur. The vice-principal, well supported by the behaviour and inclusion instructor, has developed the work of the 'hub', which supports pupils to manage their behaviour. Through 'the hub', further work has been undertaken to support pupils' mental health. For example, the school is in the process of becoming a TaMHS (targeted mental health services) school.

Far greater emphasis is now placed on celebrating success. For example, the school's first whole-school awards event was due to take place at the time of the monitoring inspection. Pupils report a sense of 'healthy competition' and say that school is more enjoyable as a result.

Work to improve attendance has continued since the last monitoring inspection.

Leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely and take action to support those who find it difficult to attend regularly. The work of 'the hub' has had a significant impact on individuals who are persistently absent from school. Since the inspection in July 2016, attendance has improved considerably. Current figures show that attendance is continuing to improve but remains below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

In recent years, pupils have made less progress than others nationally. Following the inspection in July 2016, leaders took immediate action to improve behaviour and attendance, and the quality of teaching throughout the school. Although these aspects of the school's work have been positive, they have not yet had time to significantly impact on pupils' outcomes across the school. However, in 2017, a greater proportion of pupils achieved a good pass in English and mathematics than in previous years, rising from 46% in 2016, to 60% in 2017. At the time of the monitoring inspection, information about pupils' progress nationally was not yet available for comparison. This will therefore be explored at the next monitoring inspection.

Disadvantaged pupils have made very poor progress in recent years. The school's information suggests that in 2017, disadvantaged pupils' outcomes were considerably lower than that of other pupils in the school, in English and mathematics particularly. Current plans to improve outcomes for this group of pupils are now more specific than they have been in the past. Leaders are beginning to evaluate the impact of actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils, but they do not yet evaluate their work with precision.

Current pupils are continuing to make greater progress than in the past. Leaders' tracking information indicates that outcomes will improve further in 2018. Again, this will be examined at the next monitoring inspection.

External support

At the time of the last monitoring inspection, there had been very little impact of the trust's work to support school improvement. This remains the case. Some of the money that the school has paid the trust has been used to fund refurbishments to the building. Beyond this, there is no evidence that the trust has contributed to school improvement since the last monitoring inspection. The improvements that have been made are the result of the work of staff in the school. The trust has not provided acceptable value for money.