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Mr Fuzel Choudhury
Principal
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Dear Mr Choudhury

Special measures monitoring inspection of Rockwood Academy

Following my visit with Alun Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 11–12 November 2015, 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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.

I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers. This is subject to consultation with Her Majesty's Inspector.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Trustees, the Academies Advisers Unit and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Urgently improve systems for safeguarding students so that statutory requirements are met and statutory guidance is fully adhered to by:
 - governors checking annually that all statutory safeguarding requirements are met and that all statutory guidance is followed
 - providing all staff with appropriate training in all aspects of safeguarding
 - extending the use of 'Prevent' strategies to raise students' awareness about the risks of extremism
 - making sure that the child protection policy for dealing with allegations against staff reflects updated statutory guidance
 - including arrangements for dealing with allegations of abuse against leaders and managers in the child protection policy
 - stating how the child protection policy will be reviewed and revised.
- Ensure leadership and management are effective by:
 - securing equality of opportunity for all staff and students
 - clarifying the different responsibilities of leaders and governors
 - developing systems to ensure that all aspects of the academy's work are rigorously monitored, evaluated and used to make improvements, including those for recruitment and promotion
 - setting out clearly the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating all academy policies.
- Review the academy's curriculum and programmes for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development that:
 - ensures students' learning has sufficient breadth, balance and coverage of all aspects of their personal development, including how to stay safe
 - fully prepares students for life in modern Britain and a multi-cultural society
 - raises students' awareness around the risks of extremism.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that all groups achieve equally well by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan opportunities to stretch the most able students and meet the needs of those who require additional help
 - marking of students' work gives an indication of strengths, provides advice on how to make improvements and checks whether students have acted on previous advice.

External reviews of governance and of the academy's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 11–12 November 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectors met with you, as the Principal, members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. Meetings were also held with the Chief Executive Officer, Chair and other representatives of the Academy Trust Board, a group of parents and representatives from the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors spoke to pupils during breaktimes, lunchtimes and in classrooms, and met formally with groups of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised academy documents, including leaders' action plans and evaluations of the academy's work, and those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the quality of teaching and records of pupils' progress and attainment. Inspectors also took into account the 58 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Context

Since the previous inspection there have been a number of contextual changes. The academy has been renamed Rockwood Academy. A substantive Principal took up post in September 2015. Also in September, an assistant vice-principal with responsibility for teaching and learning, and a coordinator for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs joined the academy. The previous Chair of the Governing Body resigned last term. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed. One parent governor is no longer part of the governing body. One new trust governor has joined. Eleven members of staff have submitted their resignations this term.

In January 2016, an assistant vice-principal overseeing behaviour for learning and a new head of the English department and a head of the mathematics department will join the staff. Currently two vacancies for January 2016 are not filled, both for teachers of science.

The CORE Education Trust has been restructured. A new Chair of the Board of the Directors of the Trust has been appointed. The former executive principal of the academy is now the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust.

Her Majesty's Inspectors were aware during the inspection that serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the academy in response to the allegations were considered, alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection, to inform inspectors' judgements.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils in their GCSE examinations in 2015 were stronger than expected, although there was a decline on the previous academic year.

The academy's analysis of provisional examination results shows that indicators of progress in English and mathematics are likely to be in line with or exceed that of other schools nationally. Pupils also achieved well in science, Urdu, French and religious education.

The progress made by disadvantaged pupils in both English and mathematics is likely to compare favourably to that of other pupils nationally and these pupils have exceeded the progress made by their classmates in the academy. Likewise, the progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, particularly in mathematics, was much better than the weak performance that leaders predicted previously.

However, some groups of pupils made slower progress than they should have. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls widened considerably. For example, the proportion of boys attaining five or more A* to C grades was 26% below that of girls. One of the reasons for this is that boys made less progress than girls in English. Although a higher proportion of the top grades have been secured than in the past across subjects, the most-able pupils did not make enough progress in English, mathematics and religious education by the time they left the academy. Middle-ability pupils made slow progress in mathematics and history. Pupils underachieved in Arabic and child development.

The academy's predictions of what pupils were expected to achieve in their 2015 GCSE examinations were inaccurate. This is because some teachers and leaders have lacked the skills to correctly assess the performance of pupils. Leaders have directly acknowledged the failings of past systems and are taking appropriate actions to remedy this. This has resulted in a complete overhaul of the way in which performance information is captured, analysed and used.

Leaders at all levels are rapidly developing their skills in analysing performance information. For example, the reviews of subjects undertaken in response to this year's examination results are now far more detailed and rigorous. These processes have enabled leaders, including subject leaders, to identify particular groups of pupils who may be underachieving in subject areas, and to put strategies in place to tackle these weaknesses. This is a considerable step forward, as leaders are now using this information to drive improvements. Furthermore, an increase in the frequency of information captured enables leaders to act more quickly in response to underachievement than in the past and track the impact of the actions they take to quicken progress far more robustly. Target setting has also been adjusted in order to raise the aspirations and expectations of teachers and pupils.

Information for current pupils on roll is showing some positive improvements in the expected attainment of pupils for this academic year. However, this information has only recently been captured. Leaders are now taking suitable action to secure the reliability of this information so that they can have confidence in it. Work with commissioned leaders from other schools is supporting teachers and leaders in ensuring that the academy's assessment practices are fit for purpose, and in checking the accuracy of judgements made.

Strategies are increasingly in place to accelerate the progress of pupils with lower than average attainment on entry. These include breakfast clubs that offer pupils additional work in literacy and numeracy. The curriculum is also better organised in Years 7 and 8 to give pupils the time that they need to secure their basic skills. Staffing shortages mean that the Year 7 Sunday catch-up programme that yielded successful results last academic year has been delayed until next term.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders are now well focused on raising standards of teaching in the academy. In a short space of time, clear expectations have been set out to teachers, underpinned by training, monitoring and the sharing of practice to secure greater consistency. This rigour is beginning to yield results. Teachers are increasingly using the approaches and training they have been provided with to plan lessons that are well structured, set a clear direction for what pupils are learning and build in opportunities for teachers to make regular checks to ensure that pupils are learning well.

The best lessons in the academy feature highly effective practice. Dynamic and skilful questioning captures and sustains pupils' interests and demands that pupils think more deeply about their learning. Positive relationships, built on high expectations and mutual respect, enthuse pupils in their learning so that they engage wholeheartedly in their lessons. Strong subject knowledge informs the setting of work and tasks that challenge pupils to do their best.

Inspectors observed how modern British values were well promoted in the humanities subjects. In these cases, a powerful vein of social, spiritual, moral and cultural learning permeates pupils' experiences in the classroom. For example, in religious education lessons, pupils were able to demonstrate their understanding, appreciation and respect for other faiths. In a Year 10 history lesson, pupils articulated committed, mature and sensitive viewpoints about the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination in America.

Marking is improving because the academy's policy is applied with greater consistency. Leaders also share examples of successful marking so that teachers are clearer on what is expected of them. When this practice is at its most effective,

pupils say that the feedback their teacher provides helps them to overcome their mistakes and thus learn better.

Although better than in the previous visit, the quality of teaching is still uneven across the academy. Sometimes, if tasks go on for too long when some pupils are ready to move on, their focus wanes and they can begin to talk among themselves. This is particularly the case when the work set is not interesting enough or challenging. Other times, pupils begin to struggle because the work is too hard and their teacher does not notice this quickly enough. Training has now led to more effective deployment of teaching assistants within lessons. As a result, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are increasingly well supported.

Teachers are beginning to adopt approaches to improve pupils' literacy skills such as identifying pupils' spelling errors when marking pupils' work. Pupils also rehearse their writing skills in lessons outside of English. For example, in a geography lesson, Year 8 pupils were tasked with producing a piece of descriptive writing about the topic of Egypt which they had been learning about. The teacher shared keywords with pupils and challenged them to expand their vocabulary. However, teachers do not set out their expectations of the form and style of writing clearly enough. As a result, the quality of pupils' written work can be mixed.

In a minority of lessons, pupils' learning and progress over time continues to be adversely affected by short-term, temporary teachers. Leaders have worked to mitigate this issue in the short term and ensure that pupils receive well-planned work despite not having their regular teacher. The Principal has ensured that by the beginning of the next term the large majority of vacant posts will be filled by specialist subject teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good teaching and positive relationships nurture pupils' good attitudes to learning and a strong work ethic. Some teachers inspire in their pupils a keenness, eagerness and thirst for learning. However, there continues to be variability. This is particularly the case in some lessons delivered by temporary teachers. Although pupils generally comply with their teachers' instructions, they do not always listen attentively, can be slow to start tasks and do not concentrate fully on their work. When this is the case, low-level disruption can occur.

A significant minority of responses to staff questionnaires returned during the inspection continue to say that the behaviour of pupils is not yet good. However, there are improvements. Most staff now say that the way in which behaviour is managed is more consistent and that they are well supported by leaders in this. This is because leaders have set out higher standards of how pupils' should behave and monitor pupils' behaviour more closely. The highly visible presence of staff and

leaders around the academy site means that pupils are better supervised. The introduction of bells has considerably improved pupils' punctuality and made circulation between lessons more efficient. When moving between lessons and during breaktimes and lunchtimes, most pupils conduct themselves sensibly and are polite and respectful to adults. Standards of uniform are excellent; pupils look smartly dressed at all times and wear their new uniforms with pride. The small number of pupils who can become boisterous are challenged effectively by staff.

Pupils' mature and respectful attitudes were further evidenced in their conduct during the two-minute silence held for Remembrance Day. A ceremony involving staff and pupils from the academy, pupils from the neighbouring primary school and representatives from the military was held in the academy courtyard, during which pupils read out examples of poetry. Across the academy site, pupils participated fully in a reflective silence to commemorate the occasion.

A new behaviour policy has been approved by governors and has been recently introduced. Although it is too soon to realise the impact of this policy, it has benefited from consultation with pupils and now has a stronger focus on rewarding positive behaviour.

Attendance during the inspection was high, although overall attendance this academic year is slightly below the national average due to pupils' absence for religious observance. The number of pupils who are excluded from the academy, which had risen at the time of the previous visit, has now reduced significantly and is below average. Effective systems are in place to log and track behaviour over time. These systems show that pupils' behaviour is improving. The academy's records show that bullying is rare. Pupils confirm this.

The safeguarding of pupils continues to receive due prominence. Personal development lessons equip pupils with a strong and often insightful understanding of a wide range of risks, including the dangers of using the internet, gang culture and intolerant attitudes towards people from other backgrounds. Year 11 pupils spoken to demonstrated an astute awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. The academy's work is supported by a well-developed training programme for staff that means adults who work at the academy are highly alert and vigilant to the signs of risk. This has included training on the most recent government guidance on keeping children safe, which was not in place at the time of the previous visit. As a result, the overwhelming majority of staff questionnaires returned said that pupils were safe.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The new Principal has embarked on his role with passion, commitment, drive and determination. His clear vision is suitably focused on academy improvement through raising standards of teaching, learning and behaviour. He has responded very

directly to the weaknesses identified in the previous monitoring inspection and tackled them robustly. Effective working relations have been forged quickly with both the Chief Executive of the Trust and the new Chair of the Governing Body. This is supporting the development and delivery of the academy's improvement goals. As a result, there have been marked improvements in some aspects of the academy's work since the previous visit.

Other new leaders are already making a good contribution to the improvement of the academy. Quick work has been undertaken to audit the quality of teaching in the academy based on a broader range of evidence than in the past. This is helping leaders to arrive at more accurate judgements of the quality of teaching because they are now taking into account the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress over time. A robust strategy is now in place to improve the quality of teaching. Clear expectations and standards have been established for all teachers. Support has been put in place rapidly for teachers to help them develop their practice. Staff briefings and training sessions provide valuable opportunities to share and celebrate identified examples of good practice. As a result, leaders are laying the foundations for sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in the academy.

The new coordinator who oversees provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has engaged well with the new code of practice and ensured that staff have begun to receive relevant training to improve support for these pupils in lessons. Provision for looked after children has been carefully reviewed and now meets statutory requirements.

The majority of staff confirm that the academy has improved since the previous visit and increasingly feel that the academy is well managed. Most staff continue to be proud to be part of the academy. A dwindling minority remain dissatisfied with leadership and management, citing the relentlessness and uncompromising nature of the current regime and workload issues. However, a number of comments offered are supportive of the clarity and impact of the Principal's work.

Systems of monitoring and evaluation are increasingly in place. More regular and robust checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' work are now undertaken by senior and middle leaders. This is developing the role of middle leaders whose understanding of their pivotal role in delivering academy improvements has been strengthened. Consequently, leaders have a clearer and more realistic awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and what needs to be done to move the academy forward.

Some aspects of the academy's work are still not sharp enough. For example, some plans for improvement do not feature measurable targets against which the success and impact of leaders' work can be gauged. This limits leaders' ability to evaluate the difference their actions have made to pupils' learning and outcomes, and thereby

judge the quality of their work. Similarly, the impact of pupil premium spending is not evaluated carefully enough to enable leaders to know what strategies used work best.

Leaders have introduced improvements to the organisation and breadth of the curriculum for younger pupils this academic year. Pupils are now offered an entitlement to dance, drama and gymnastics. Leaders have also made adaptations to the amount of time allocated to different subjects and the range of subjects offered to better support the needs of pupils of different abilities. However, there continues to be a legacy of narrowness in the range of qualifications offered for older pupils at Key Stage 4, particularly within the arts and technology subjects. As a result, the curriculum does not yet meet the aspirations and interests of all pupils. Nevertheless, leaders have recognised this and sought to enrich the curriculum through extra-curricular clubs and activities and through opportunities offered with partners such as local universities.

The Chair of the Governing Body has a very strong understanding of the roles and duties of the governing body and an effective strategic vision for how the governing body will develop in the medium- and long-term. He has quickly acquired a secure grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. Governors are increasingly well informed and able to question and challenge the information offered to them by leaders so that they are more confident in their awareness of the quality of the academy's work.

Inspectors met with a group of parents who shared their concerns about the number of temporary teachers still working in the school. Some pupils also echoed these concerns. While the academy continues to use temporary teachers, inspectors found that there are robust systems in place to regularly check the quality of teaching and provide training when needed. Leaders have also worked effectively to reduce the number of temporary teachers from next term.

Parents also expressed concerns about academic standards across the school. They told inspectors that they were unhappy with some of the staff changes and the way the school has changed its ethos. Inspectors found convincing evidence that the changes to staffing and to the academy's ethos have both been important improvements in tackling the serious inadequacies found at the time of the inspection in March 2014. The new senior leadership team is resolute in ensuring that past inadequacies in leadership and safeguarding should not return. While senior leaders fully appreciate that standards need to improve further, and are under no illusions that there is much work left to be done, any suggestion that the academy should look back is rightly ignored.

External support

The CORE Education Trust provides highly effective support for the academy. Members' and directors' roles have been restructured to remove organisational conflicts of interests, while retaining the strengths of the trust's expertise and skills base. The trust has a very strong strategic vision for its role in the future development of the academy. The Chief Executive Officer of the Trust continues to play a powerful part in the strategic direction of the academy, offering both challenge and support to the Principal. Weekly meetings, for example, are supplemented by checks to gather evidence about the impact of leaders' work. Commissioned support in areas such as middle leadership is supporting the development of assessment practices in the academy. Partnerships with leaders from outstanding schools are beginning to further strengthen middle leaders' skills and abilities, although this work is at an early stage.

The renaming of the academy at the beginning of this academic year has provided the pupils, staff and leaders of the academy with a 'fresh start'. Pupils spoken to by inspectors welcomed this, as they felt that it would help the academy to move forward positively from the 'bad image of the past' and offer the opportunity to change public perceptions of their school.