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Mr S Carter
Acting Principal
Phoenix Academy
Duce Drive
Dawley
Telford
TF4 3JS

Dear Mr Carter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Phoenix Academy

Following my visit to your school on 19 May 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you as the Acting Principal and with groups of middle and senior leaders. I also met with a member of the board of the Telford Co-operative Multi Academy Trust, who is also the Chief Executive Officer of the Community Academies Trust. I made short visits to a number of lessons and looked at the quality of work in students' books. The academy improvement plan was evaluated. No statement of action has been produced by the Telford Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of contextual changes. The Telford Multi-Academy Trust, of which the academy is part, has a new directorate. The academy, alongside all others within the Telford Co-operative Multi-Academy

Trust is currently undergoing a significant staffing restructure. The local governing body has ceased its strategic role and academy leaders are now accountable to an executive advisory board formed by the trust. In September 2015, the current Acting Principal will become Executive Head of School, overseeing both Phoenix Academy and Lakeside Academy. Proposals have been put forward for the Community Academies Trust to become the sponsor of all the secondary academies who are currently part of the Telford Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust. On the day of the inspection, Year 8 students were not in school and a number of lessons took place in different classrooms because of damage to buildings caused by a flood.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders have acted swiftly and with determination to address the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Key systems and procedures have been considerably strengthened, and leaders have worked to secure higher expectations of students' achievement and behaviour.

The academy improvement plan details a range of well-considered and relevant actions to tackle the areas for improvement that were identified in the previous inspection. At times, greater clarity is needed to support rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the plan. For example, some success criteria need to be made measurable or quantified in order that leaders can accurately assess the impact of their actions on student outcomes. The plan benefits from identifying the need to engage with the proposed sponsor in order to provide a smooth transition to future operating systems. A statement of action has not been produced by the Telford Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust.

Leaders have now embedded systems to track the progress of students against challenging targets across subjects. Much work has gone into ensuring that teachers' assessments are fit for purpose and accurate. As a result, leaders now have greater trust in this information than they have done in the past. Leaders at all levels are now able to identify students who are underachieving and offer better additional support to close the gaps in students' learning so that their progress is accelerated. Leaders now need to ensure that these interventions take place more systematically lower down the school in order that underachievement is arrested much earlier.

Leaders have placed considerable emphasis on raising the profile of attendance in the academy. The students who I spoke to are very aware of the need for good attendance. They said that their attendance was checked routinely by their form tutor, good attendance is rewarded, and that quick actions were taken if their attendance should begin to fall. The academy's work is beginning to bring about some incremental improvements in overall attendance figures and a reduction in the

proportion of students who are regularly absent from school. There is much work left to do if leaders are to raise attendance figures to be in line with those of other schools nationally.

More rigorous systems to monitor patterns in the behaviour of students over time are now in place. The information gathered is beginning to enable leaders to respond to this information so that they can bring about further improvements. There has been a marked reduction in fixed-term exclusions since the previous inspection. Students feel that behaviour is improving and say that there are clear consequences should their conduct not meet expectations. However, students also say that the negative behaviour of a small minority of students continues to disrupt their learning in some lessons.

Information about the achievement of current students at the academy shows that some improvements in examination results are expected this academic year, but achievement remains too low. Performance is likely to remain below the minimum expectations set by government, known as floor standards. Gaps between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students and their peers, both in school and nationally, remain unacceptably wide in mathematics. A pupil premium review has now been commissioned. The outcomes of this need to be included in the academy improvement plan.

During the short visits that I made to classrooms, I saw how teachers are beginning to use in their lessons aspects of the training that has been delivered to them. This was evident in the approaches teachers take to marking students' work. Students use purple pens to respond to and make improvements to their work based on the written guidance offered by their teacher. This is helping teachers' marking to have a better impact on students' learning. This policy is not yet adopted consistently.

Teachers are increasingly using information about their students to inform their lesson planning. Different groups of students and information about students' abilities are clearly marked on teachers' seating plans. This has resulted in a raised awareness of students' individual learning needs and how well they should be achieving. I saw for example, in a mathematics lesson, how the teacher had used information gathered from the ongoing assessment of students' work to adapt students' programmes of study to help them to secure their basic mathematical skills and understanding of key mathematical concepts. Some teachers do not make good use of the information they have about their students to set work that challenges and engages all students. Teachers are not demanding enough in their expectations of students and this is reflected in variations in the standards of presentation I saw in the work of some students.

Leaders have commissioned external support from other schools, and the academy has been increasingly involved in national networks. This support has involved joint observations of lessons with leaders and the checking of teachers' assessments. Further work is needed with middle leaders in order to build their capacity to bring about improvements.

The external review of governance has not been undertaken. The current governing body has now been suspended from its strategic duties. Governance duties will be undertaken by an education advisory board made up of trust directors. The expertise of these directors provides a greater level of challenge to academy leaders.

With the dissolution of the Telford Multi-Academy Trust, and a new potential sponsor, plans for the future leadership arrangements of the academy may offer a more positive future strategic direction for the academy in the light of the failings of former trust arrangements.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The proprietor's statement of action is not fit for purpose. The Telford Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust did not prepare a statement of action.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State and the Director of Children's Services for Telford and Wrekin. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
- For Academies only - CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- The lead inspector