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27 February 2020

Charlotte Whysall  
Headteacher  
The Phoenix School  
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Cambridgeshire  
PE2 5SD

Dear Miss Whysall

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Phoenix School**

Following my visit to your school on 25–26 February 2020, 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 September 2019.

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.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Peterborough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2019**

- Safeguarding procedures and processes for the recruitment of staff have not been rigorous and robust for some time. New staff who have been employed have not been correctly checked in line with statutory expectations. Leaders need external support from the local authority to review all procedures and ensure that appropriate checks have been made. The training of staff needs to be prioritised. Leaders need to regularly review the quality of child protection practices to continue to improve the safeguarding culture.
- The curriculum that leaders have designed is very new. Curriculum plans are not established. Leaders need to make sure that there are appropriate plans in place for all subjects. Leaders need to ensure that these are adhered to by all teachers.
- The use of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans is not good enough. Too many teachers do not plan for what each pupil needs to learn. Pupils do not make the steps of progress that they should. Leaders know that the quality of the EHC plans is not suitable. They now need to make sure that the quality improves rapidly. Leaders need to ensure that pupils receive the best-quality provision that meets pupils' needs.
- Governors are not effective. They need to review their own practices. They need to provide appropriate challenge and support to the school to ensure that the quality of education and the safeguarding of pupils are of good quality.
- Too many teachers and support staff do not have the necessary training to help pupils with profound special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn well. More specialist training is required for staff. More appropriate resources are required for pupils to access learning activities at their level.
- There are too many different systems for recording behaviour and welfare incidents, including those when a member of staff has needed to physically intervene. Leaders cannot analyse these well to see what is working and what needs to change for a pupil. Leaders have changed the behaviour policy. Staff need to follow the newly agreed approaches.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 25 February 2020 to 26 February 2020**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, I met with you and other leaders, the chair of the interim executive board, and a representative of the local authority. I spoke with the school's improvement partner, and an independent education consultant, on the telephone. You took me on a tour of both the school's main sites and 'the hub'. We met and spoke with pupils during our site visits. I looked at a range of school documents, particularly those to do with safeguarding. We looked at the local authority's statement of action and the school's action plans together.

### **Context**

Since the inspection in September 2019, the school's governing body has been disbanded. The local authority has put an independent executive board in place to govern the school. The board met for the first time in January 2020. The board has employed a safeguarding consultant to support the school, on a temporary basis. This member of staff took up her post on 24 February 2020.

You expect that the school will convert to become an academy school on 1 May 2020, sponsored by the Lime Trust. The chief executive of the Lime Trust was present during the inspection and met with me on the second day of the inspection.

### **The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection**

You have done a great deal to improve practices in relation to the safer recruitment of staff. The school's single central record has been completely overhauled and is now well kept, meeting all requirements. Leaders, including the school business manager, have reviewed the school's personnel records thoroughly. These were previously disorganised and incomplete. You now have an appropriate, robust system in place for keeping records about staff. You have audited every file to make sure that each one contains all the required information. Where there were gaps, leaders have carried out assessments to assure themselves that there are no unacceptable risks.

As well as strengthening procedures in relation to existing staff, you have also improved systems for the future recruitment of staff. For example, leaders have put a recruitment checklist in place to ensure that all the necessary checks are completed in a timely fashion, before new staff are allowed to start working at the school. You have also introduced a formal induction process to ensure that all new staff are given the information they need, particularly concerning safeguarding.

You arranged for the local authority's adviser to provide safeguarding training for all staff. This took place over two days in October 2019. The training provided staff with essential information about fundamental aspects of safeguarding. For example, the training made clear staff members' responsibilities for recognising and reporting possible signs of abuse and neglect. It also emphasised the importance of ensuring that staff are vigilant around school and report anything that concerns them.

Leaders have also strengthened procedures for reporting child protection concerns. You have chosen to use an electronic software package, and this is now fully in use. Where pupils already had child protection records, these have been scanned and uploaded to the electronic system. We looked at the electronic records together. I could see that the system is being used appropriately. Staff are reporting their concerns, and leaders are taking prompt action, where necessary, in response to them.

Improving safeguarding has, quite rightly, taken the lion's share of leaders' time since the inspection in September 2019. This has limited leaders' capacity to focus on other areas that need to improve, including the quality of education. However, there has been some progress. For example, leaders have improved procedures for the way in which EHC plans are written and reviewed.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

You and the school's other leaders were not surprised by the special measures judgement. You feel that it was fair and just. You know that the school needs to improve rapidly and have started to take appropriate action. Rightly, you and the school's other leaders have prioritised safeguarding as your most important focus for improvement at this point. A local authority adviser carried out a review of safeguarding. You also arranged for an independent consultant to carry out a further safeguarding review. You found these reviews useful and have acted on their recommendations.

#### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Suitable plans have been put in place to address the school's weaknesses.
- The school is working closely with the local authority, and other appropriate organisations, to help them to move the school forward.
- The school is working closely with the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust that is expected to sponsor the school from May 2020.

#### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The school's action plans could be improved and strengthened. For example, dates and deadlines for actions would be helpful. The inclusion of milestones,

showing the progress the school expects to make in each area by a given point, would help to ensure that momentum is maintained.

### **External support**

The local authority is supporting the school well. It took appropriate action to tackle the weaknesses in governance following the previous inspection. A school improvement board is now fully established. The local authority's assistant director for special educational needs is a member of the board. The local authority has carried out a review of safeguarding in the school. It continues to be closely involved in supporting the school to continue to improve safeguarding.