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4 June 2014

Dr David Dennison  
Interim Principal  
Hope Academy  
Ashton Road  
Newton-le-Willows  
Merseyside  
WA12 0AQ

Dear Dr Dennison

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Hope Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 3 June 2014, 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.

This visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2014.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim Principal, representatives of the governing body, senior leaders and representatives of the sponsors. The sponsors' statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

### **Context**

The Principal has retired and an interim Principal has been appointed. A recruitment process is underway to appoint a substantive Principal. The Chair of the Governing Body has resigned and a new Chair has been appointed. Three new governors have been appointed by the sponsors. A number of other staff have resigned their posts and will leave in the summer while others will leave through voluntary redundancy.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

Sponsors have responded swiftly to address some of the key weaknesses in leadership and management. The new Chair of the Governing Body and interim Principal have engendered an atmosphere of openness and honesty. Sponsors, governors and senior leaders are now working much more collaboratively to ensure that reports about students' progress are shared. Discussions are much more candid and all parties are keen to 'get down to brass tacks'.

Governance has been strengthened in response to a very thorough external review. Governors are now acutely aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are in the process of re-organising the way they work so that the leadership of individual committees is strengthened and they become more effective and autonomous.

Governors and senior leaders have opened the doors to parents so that they are fully informed of improvements as they happen. The local authority and some high-performing schools are supporting leaders at all levels to put necessary quality assurance systems in place.

The sponsors' statement of action and the school's improvement plan are too vague. Sponsors have not provided governors with a clear picture of what reasonable progress would look like over the next 18 months. Consequently, governors cannot tell senior leaders whether the progress made is enough.

Sponsors have not told governors what evidence of progress they expect to see. One of the areas for improvement from the section 5 report is for teachers to receive very clear feedback about how to improve their teaching. However, sponsors have not requested to see examples of feedback from lesson observations nor have they stated what high-quality feedback would look like. This lack of clarity is unhelpful to senior leaders and governors.

It is not clear from the statement of action or the school's improvement plan who is responsible for what. Not all senior and middle leaders are named in the plan, making it difficult to hold them to account if rapid improvements are not made. Plenty of teachers have been held to account for poor performance but the same cannot be said for the senior leadership team. Their individual and collective performance is now under scrutiny.

Targets set for students' achievement are insufficiently challenging. Furthermore, no progress targets have been agreed for Key Stage 3. There are no expectations in the plans that standards will be verified by listening to students, scrutinising work in

books and looking at teachers' long-term and short-term planning. This leaves sponsors and governors vulnerable to accepting data that may be inaccurate.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for St. Helens, the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit and the Education Funding Agency (EFA). This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon

**Her Majesty's Inspector**