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Mr Steven Carter
Executive Head of School
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Dear Mr Carter

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Telford Langley School

Following my visit with Neil Morris, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 2–3 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2015. 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:

The academy is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs. This should be done in 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 education advisory board and the Director of Children's Services for Telford and Wrekin.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2015:

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in English and mathematics, so that the progress and attainment of all groups of pupils improves rapidly, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about pupils' progress from assessments and the regular marking of pupils' work to plan lessons at the right level of difficulty for different groups of pupils
 - making sure that teachers' planning is clear about the learning expected in each lesson, so that teachers can check that pupils are making progress in their learning and adapt or provide support during the lesson
 - consistently and effectively challenging low-level disruption so that the focus remains on learning in all lessons
 - ensuring that teachers receive good training and support to develop effective questioning skills, so that questions probe and develop a greater depth and understanding in pupils' responses
 - making sure that teachers' marking leads to improvement in pupils' work
 - insisting that teachers seize every opportunity when planning lessons to develop pupils' skills and confidence in reading and writing, and numeracy
 - insisting on high standards of written work and presentation in books.

- Close the attainment and progress gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally by:
 - analysing information about the achievement of pupils across all years to ensure that well planned interventions are put in place.

- Improve the attendance of all groups of pupils to at least the national average by:
 - implementing robust systems to track and monitor pupils' attendance, so that interventions can be put in place quickly to reduce the proportion of pupils not attending the academy each day.

- Strengthen leadership and management across the academy so that all actions drive improvement in pupils' achievement, by:
 - evaluating rigorously the quality of teaching throughout the academy, using information about pupils' progress as well as observations and scrutinies of pupils' work
 - providing relevant support and training for middle leaders
 - urgently reviewing the curriculum to ensure that pupils have access to a range of appropriate courses, and review the allocation of time given to lessons to improve the pace at which pupils learn
 - analysing more thoroughly the information gathered by the academy regarding exclusions and behaviour and use this to target action in a more focused way
 - implementing robust strategies across the whole academy to improve literacy

and numeracy, so that every opportunity is seized to support pupils in the development of these basic skills.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2–3 December

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, as the executive head of school, members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. I also met with the Chief Executive Officer of the Community Academies Trust who is now the academy sponsor. Inspectors spoke to pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes and in classrooms, and met formally with groups of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised academy documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the quality of teaching and records of pupils' progress and attainment.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a number of contextual changes have taken place. The academy, which was formerly known as Phoenix Academy, has been renamed the Telford Langley School. On 1 November 2015, the academy became officially sponsored by the Community Academies Trust.

A staffing restructuring took place towards the end of the last academic year across all four of the academies that were then part of the Telford Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust. This has resulted in significant shifts to the staffing of the academy.

The executive head of school, who was formerly the acting principal of Phoenix Academy, took up post at the beginning of this academic year. He also oversees the work of the Telford Park School. A number of senior and middle leader posts are shared across the Telford Park School and the Telford Langley School, including five directors of learning, the director of inclusion and three deputy headteachers.

Less than half of the teaching staff from Phoenix Academy are part of the current teaching team in the Telford Langley School. One deputy headteacher left the academy at the end of the previous academic year. The academy currently has vacancies for four full-time members of staff, all within the science, humanities and modern foreign languages departments. A director of learning in English has been appointed to start in January. In the interim, a deputy headteacher is overseeing this role.

Governance of the academy is now undertaken by an education advisory board.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils who left the academy having completed their examinations in 2015 remained below floor standards. This was not unexpected. The academy's analysis of provisional results shows uneven improvements on the previous year, and some aspects that declined. Only 31% of pupils secured five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, which is significantly below the national average. Less than half of pupils made expected progress in mathematics or in English. Attainment was too low across a range of other subjects. Few pupils secured the highest grades. All key groups underachieved, including those pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers both in-school and nationally are closing far too slowly. The measures for progress in all core subjects were in the bottom 10 per cent of schools nationally.

Although performance was well below national averages, there were some emergent improvements. The progress that pupils made in mathematics, while still inadequate, was better than in the previous year. This is because interventions last academic year began to have an impact. However, they took place too late to arrest the legacy of underachievement over time in this subject. In some subjects, including drama, music, ICT, and in vocational subjects, pupils achieved better. This was further reflected in the academy's 'progress 8' score which, although low, shows improvements on the previous year because some pupils followed courses that better suited their abilities and interests.

The examination results in English were a sizeable shortfall from the academy's predictions of what pupils were expected to achieve. Leaders have responded to this by changing examination boards and introducing new measures to check the accuracy of assessments. However, at this stage, predictions in this subject are based on too limited a range of evidence to be deemed reliable.

Pupils in the current Year 11 are making better progress than they have done in the past in some subjects. This is particularly the case in English and mathematics. This is because some teachers are increasingly able to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses in learning. Teachers are therefore able to target their teaching and additional support to help pupils to develop their weaker skills. Pupils in Year 11 are regularly attending sessions after school that are further accelerating their learning. Consequently, the academy's analysis of most recent tests in mathematics are showing that many pupils are making quick progress since the start of the academic year.

However, in Key Stage 3, pupils, particularly middle and lower-ability pupils, are not making the progress that they should. This is because expectations of pupils are still too low. As a result, pupils are not yet able to overcome the deficiencies in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Boys in particular are making less progress

than girls. Furthermore, work to tackle the weak standards of literacy and numeracy of pupils in the academy has been too slow to start. Plans are in place to address this. Leaders now have an initial baseline assessment of all pupils' reading and spelling ages. These reveal considerable weaknesses in these skills across the academy. Interventions are being planned through corrective reading, writing and numeracy programmes. Leaders recognise that tackling pupils' low standards of basic skills is a priority area to move forward on with urgency.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching at the academy is improving. However, it remains inconsistent and is not yet good enough to raise standards at the pace needed for all pupils. In some subjects, particularly science and modern foreign languages, a lack of skilled, specialist, permanent teachers has had a detrimental impact of pupils' learning over time.

Where learning is weaker, pupils' progress is held back by teachers' low expectations and poor consideration of pupils' abilities when planning lessons. Work is set that does not challenge pupils to achieve what they are capable of. At times, teachers accept work that is of a poor standard, and badly presented, particularly from boys. When the work set is not challenging, or does not inspire pupils' interests, pupils begin to lose concentration and engage in low-level disruption, such as talking amongst themselves about issues irrelevant to their learning. At times, pupils do not listen carefully to their teachers' explanations and this dilutes the impact of teaching.

Some teachers do not check how well their pupils are learning. As a result, pupils are moved on to new activities without having fully understood important concepts. Pupils' low-levels of literacy continue to be a barrier to their progress and there are not enough opportunities to develop these skills across the curriculum.

Conversely, where learning is at its best, it is shaped by the teachers' high expectations and strong subject knowledge that inform the planning of lessons that challenge pupils to achieve their best. For example, in a Year 11 history lesson, the teacher's tenacious questioning and well-chosen activities encouraged pupils to think deeply about their learning, extend their ideas and learn at a good pace. A very different, but equally successful, approach was observed in a Year 11 mathematics lesson. Here, the teacher used information gathered about pupils' prior understanding of graphs to set tasks that matched the abilities of pupils well. Careful checks on how well pupils were learning meant that the teacher could tell when pupils were ready to move on to more demanding work. Pupils had highly positive attitudes to learning because they recognised the value of work that was helping them to build on their existing skills. As a result, pupils of all abilities were making good progress.

Pupils feel that improved attitudes to learning in lessons are helping them to make better progress as their lessons are now less frequently disrupted. In many lessons, a positive climate for learning is established. Homework is now set more regularly and is beginning to help pupils to extend their learning outside of class.

Application of the academy's marking policy is increasingly consistent. However, this practice does not always support pupils' learning because the feedback offered can be too vague or, alternatively, some pupils pay little attention to it. As a result, some pupils cannot articulate clearly what they need to do to improve their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Staff and pupils spoken to during the inspection feel that standards of behaviour have improved rapidly in the academy since September. The 'consequences' system, although only recently introduced, has made a difference to pupils' behaviour in lessons in a short space of time. Teachers are using this consistently and it is helping pupils to gain a clear understanding of what constitutes acceptable behaviour. Some pupils spoken to, for example, explained how they were increasingly monitoring and regulating their own behaviour in order to avoid a warning from their teacher. Some pupils feel that the system is overly punitive. On the first day of inspection, more than 40 pupils were in the 'consequences room', isolated from their peers. The majority of these cases were for low-level disruption. Likewise, this 'zero tolerance' approach has led to a sharp rise in the rates of exclusion from the academy. Leaders see this strategy as necessary to 'correct' pupils' behaviour in the short-term.

Sensible behaviour was exhibited around the academy site, including in areas such as the canteen. This is supported by the highly visible presence of academy staff and leaders. At the end of break time, the lack of litter in the canteen demonstrates pupils' respect for their environment. Canteen staff confirmed to inspectors how the standards of conduct in the canteen have improved considerably. Movement around the academy site is efficient and the number of pupils who are late to school and to lessons has decreased sharply this term.

Pupils are smartly dressed and wear their new uniforms with pride. Pupils commented how this and the renaming of the academy was helping to alter some previously negative public perceptions of the academy. One pupil spoken to commented how, at one point last academic year, they were considering leaving the academy, but are now glad that to have stayed because the academy has improved so much.

Pupils say that they feel safe around the academy site and that the close supervision of teachers is helping this. Some pupils expressed positive views about changes to the pastoral system, in which pupils are now grouped into mixed-age form groups. They feel that this is helping to improve the ethos of the academy and resulting in a greater sense of community. Some attributed this and the work of anti-bullying

ambassadors to a reduction in bullying in the academy. The personal development programme is still in its early days. As a result, pupils do not have a clear enough understanding of the range of risks they may face, including those of radicalisation and extremism. Work undertaken during tutorials is not always productive, as some teachers do not fully prepare for these sessions.

Attendance is improving. The importance of good attendance is given a high profile in the academy and is reinforced by rewards. There are well-developed systems in place, understood by staff at a variety of levels, to support those pupils whose attendance falls below expectation. However, too many pupils, particularly in Key Stage 4, are regularly absent from school. Nearly a third of pupils in Year 10 do not attend well.

The work undertaken to support the needs of some of the most vulnerable pupils in the academy is strengthening. Leaders have introduced a new system that enables them to clearly identify and closely monitor those pupils most at risk. This enables leaders to put in place additional resources and extra help for these pupils more quickly and check that this is making a difference.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The clear strategic vision and ambition of the executive head of school and Community Academies Trust, supported by an able team of deputy headteachers, is now beginning to have an impact on standards. The quality of teaching, pupils' attendance and behaviour are improving. This is starting to raise the achievement of some pupils.

The shift in the academy's ethos and aspiration was reflected well in the comments of a Key Stage 4 pupil. The pupil described how he felt that there was a strong drive towards the academy's improvement and success because 'staff and pupils were working together to get the best possible results for pupils'.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium has been completed and provides useful advice that leaders are using to inform their planning of how to spend this funding more effectively. Furthermore, ongoing support is being accessed to ensure that these plans, which are currently in development, will be fit for purpose. This budget has now been released to the academy. However, this funding has not yet been deployed to have made a difference to the pupils eligible for it. Likewise, work to help pupils with lower than average attainment on entry to the academy and those who struggle with their reading, writing and numeracy skills to catch up has not yet begun. This budget has also now been released to the academy so that leaders can get started on the delivery of this crucial work.

Robust systems for managing the performance of teachers put leaders in a better position to hold teachers to account for improving their teaching and securing the

good progress of the pupils they teach. This system is supported by a wide range of appropriate checks on the quality of teaching, so that leaders can evaluate the impact of teachers on pupils' learning and progress over time. Extra training is offered on a personalised level to teachers, in addition to the academy's professional development programme, so that they can meet the targets they have been set.

Directors of learning have a clear strategic view of what needs to be done to bring about improvements in their areas of responsibility. They know the strengths and weaknesses of their teams well. They are beginning to develop other middle leaders so that they too have the skills needed to implement positive change. However, there are still inconsistencies both amongst middle leadership, and in the quality of teaching that need to be overcome in order that the rapid improvements leaders aspire to can be made.

Safeguarding meets requirements. Effective partnerships with the local authority and other agencies support robust referral systems to keep pupils safe from harm. Although induction training has taken place, staff have not currently undertaken mandatory safeguarding training. This is planned for January. Leaders have ensured that all staff are conversant with referral procedures and the latest statutory guidance through additional training in the interim. A new, highly detailed safeguarding policy has been written and is due to be submitted to the executive advisory board to continue to drive forward robust safeguarding practice in the light of the most recent national guidance.

The curriculum, including the timings of the academy day, is now better organised. Pupils say the reduction in the length of lessons has improved the pace of learning and helps them to maintain their concentration. Additional time is now allocated to core subjects, in order to support the much-needed improvements in these areas. A broad range of high-quality vocational subjects are available to meet the needs, aspirations and interests of pupils, and these are beginning to support some improvements to pupils' achievement. Religious education, which has previously been taken off the curriculum, has now been re-introduced at Key Stage 3. Poor curriculum organisation of modern foreign languages, which impeded pupils' achievement in the past, has been addressed.

Strong plans for improvement have been produced. Strategic plans are underpinned by '100-day plans' that drive forward the implementation of new initiatives within clear timescales. These feature measurable targets against which success can be evaluated. A recent review of these plans demonstrates the good pace at which many changes have been put in place. However, it is still not always clear enough who is responsible for monitoring the impact of actions taken.

The former governing body was dissolved towards the end of the last academic year. Interim governance duties are performed by an education advisory board. This board is closely monitoring the work of the academy and offering challenge and

support to academy leaders. Robust, regular reporting procedures, that have included a detailed analysis of outcomes, are enabling this board to gain an understanding of key aspects of the academy's performance and hold leaders to account for making improvements. The board has kept an appropriately close check on safeguarding arrangements.

External support

The Community Academies Trust, which now sponsors the Telford Langley School, has played a critical role in putting in place a clear strategy for the academy's improvement. This ambitious plan has entailed an extensive staffing restructure across all academies that were formerly part of the Telford Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust. This has resulted in significant changes to teaching staff and leadership arrangements. Effective relationships forged between the sponsor and academy leaders in the months prior to the sponsor officially taking over the running of the academy ensured a smooth transition as new values, systems and procedures were adopted. Resources and expertise from within the trust are further supporting the academy through the sharing of proven, effective practice.

The pace of change is suitably quick and broad-reaching. As a result, the academy is beginning to transform, and the changes implemented are starting to yield positive evidence of impact.

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the sponsor has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that a statement of action has been produced that is fit for purpose.