



Baroness Berridge of the Vale of Catmose

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System
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Trevor Edinborough Chair of Trustees
Griffin Schools Trust The Talent Factory
4-14 Barmeston Road
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15 December 2020

Dear Trevor Edinborough,

Termination Notice to the Members and Trustees of Griffin Schools Trust (“The Trust”) in respect of Stantonbury International (“The Academy”)

I write concerning the supplementary funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the Trust in respect of the Academy, dated 30 August 2016.

Section 2A of the Academies Act 2010 allows the Regional Schools Commissioner (acting on behalf of the Secretary of State) to terminate the funding agreement of an academy that has been judged inadequate regardless of the terms in that academy’s funding agreement. Following an inspection carried out by Ofsted on 28 and 29 January 2020, the Academy was found to be inadequate and requiring special measures.

The definition of an inadequate special measures judgement is that the school is “failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school” (School Inspection Handbook, November 2019).

Following the Termination Warning Notice issued to the trust on 28th August 2020, by the Regional Schools Commissioner you provided a response setting out a range of actions the trust is taking to improve performance at the school, including evidence from the post Ofsted action plan, a report of a school monitoring visit (commissioned by the trust and carried out by an unnamed ‘external school improvement adviser’) and a summary of progress to date. You also provided details of trust governance and the central team. This evidence has been carefully considered.

The school has been with the trust now for over four years and as stated in its most recent report, Ofsted found that “the trust has overseen the decline of the school since the last inspection”. The progress made by pupils is well below national average and has remained so for the last 3 years for which data has been published. Again, Ofsted noted that “pupils do not achieve well” and that many children do not feel safe in the school. Ofsted judged that the arrangements for safeguarding at the school are not effective and found that there was a high level of poor behaviour, disruption in lessons and that leaders have not been effective in managing pupils’ behaviour.

Having carefully considered the representations provided on 3 August 2020 and 30 September 2020, the Regional Schools Commissioner has recommended that the Secretary of State, in accordance with section 2A of the Academies Act 2010, terminate the funding agreement for the Academy. The Regional School Commissioner is of the opinion that the representations offered by the trust:

- Lack evidence that that the trust has the capacity to make the rapid and sustained improvements required at the academy. Given the trust’s track record at Stantonbury International Academy, coupled with the fact that another of the trust’s secondaries, Nicholas Chamberlaine School (which joined the trust in 2013), has declined from an Ofsted good rating in 2015 to Requires Improvement in 2019, there are concerns about the secondary capacity within the trust. There is a very real risk that performance will not improve, and children will not receive the education they deserve. The monitoring report commissioned by the trust does not provide strong evidence of impact. While the report references a number of actions taken in respect of safeguarding and leadership it states “Leaders are not able easily to provide data and records of impact. This evidence finding takes up too much of their valuable time.” It is also concerning that the monitoring report has not been attributed to any named individual.
- Raise serious concerns about the trust board’s ability to hold the trust leadership to account for school improvement. The trust’s representations acknowledge that “school improvement processes were not followed with sufficient rigour and the Trust leadership should have actioned without delay the clear trigger points that are non-negotiable elements of the school improvement model.” However, the response does not set out how this failure at trust level has come about nor does it provide evidence of a trust prepared to be self-critical, to review its own failings in overseeing the decline of Stantonbury and to take appropriate action to remedy these failings at trust level. The evidence from Ofsted and from pupil outcomes from the last three years indicate that the unacceptable standards at Stantonbury did not come about, as the trust describes, as the result of a “lapse in rigour” but is, in fact, more fundamental.

- Fail to evidence, in the Post Inspection Action Plan how the trust will address key issues in the Ofsted report such as the “chaotic behaviour” in the classroom, poor attendance and excessive staff workload. Overall, the plan demonstrates what it wants to achieve but there is very little detail about how it intends to do this.

Having reviewed the representations made by the trust, I too have concluded that the school would improve more quickly with a stronger trust with a track record of secondary school improvement and have therefore decided in accordance with section 2A of the Academies Act 2010, to terminate the funding agreement for the Academy by 1 July 2021.

I recognise that this letter will be disappointing for the trust and I hope that trustees will continue to work closely with officials to ensure the best possible education for all the pupils as the Academy transfers to a new education trust. The Regional Schools Commissioner’s team will now work with you and the incoming sponsor, once confirmed, with the expectation that the termination of the funding agreement will happen as soon as possible. The Regional Schools Commissioner’s team will be in touch with your CEO shortly to agree next steps.

I am copying this letter to the National Schools Commissioner (Dominic Herrington), Ofsted (Stephen Long) and the Director of Children’s Services at Milton Keynes Council (Mac Heath). This letter will also be published on www.gov.uk.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "ER Berridge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

ELIZABETH BERRIDGE

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE