



Department
for Education

Regions Group

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The Members and Trustees of Waveney Valley Academies Trust
Prospect House
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5 December 2023

Dear Mr Collins

Termination Warning Notice to the Members and Trustees of the Waveney Valley Academies Trust in respect of Stowmarket High School

I notified the trust on 18 April that Stowmarket High School ('the academy') is not making necessary improvements.¹ On 18 April I also invited the trust's representations in response to the notification letter, which the trust provided. I have applied the principles set out in the published document, [Regional Directors decision making: 2022](#) and considered the academy's circumstances in line with the criteria set out in chapter 4 of the [Schools Causing Concern guidance](#).

As stated in my letter of 14 November, as Regional Director I must be confident, based on the information available and evidence provided, that the trust can deliver rapid and sustained improvements at the academy. Currently, I am not satisfied this is the case. I am therefore issuing a Termination Warning Notice.

In accordance with clauses 5.B to 5.E of the funding agreement for Stowmarket High School, the Secretary of State may terminate the funding agreement where paragraphs (2), (3), (4) or (5) of regulation 4 of the Coasting Schools (England) Regulations 2022 applies to the academy and the Secretary of State has notified the academy trust.

Stowmarket High School joined Waveney Valley Academies Trust on 1 September 2018. In its first inspection over four years after joining the trust, the school received a 'Requires Improvement' judgement in January 2023.

¹ The term "not making necessary improvements" is used in the Schools Causing Concern guidance (October 2022 update). A reference in that guidance, and in this letter, to schools "not making necessary improvements" should be read as meaning that such schools meet the statutory definition of 'coasting', contained in the Coasting Schools (England) Regulations 2022

I note there are some positive comments in the Ofsted report from January 2023. The report stated that *'leaders' approach to personal development is a strength of the school* and *'the curriculum offer for pupils has improved. Pupils study more subjects than they were able to before'*. The report however also highlights the following areas of improvement needed:

- Some curriculum changes are not firmly embedded in teachers' practice. Teachers do not always choose activities that support learning. Sometimes they have not got to grips with the new curriculum thinking and assessment. As a result, pupils do not make sufficient progress in some subjects. Leaders should ensure that all subjects are taught consistently well.
- Information about the needs of pupils with SEND is not always precise enough to be helpful to teachers. In addition, some teachers do not always use the information well to support pupils with SEND to progress. Leaders should ensure all teachers have, and use well, accurate information about the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Too many pupils are persistently absent. They miss too much of their education. Leaders should ensure all pupils attend school regularly.
- Leaders' chosen behaviour approaches are not being used consistently well. As a result, the behaviour of a small number of pupils does not reflect the positive behaviour shown by the rest of the school. Leaders should ensure their behaviour systems and processes are used consistently well by all staff to support pupils with their behaviour.

I welcome the progress made by the trust so far this term but remain concerned that the necessary improvements will not be achieved at pace or to the level required. For this reason, I require the trust to take the specified actions below.

The following actions ("the Specified Actions") must be taken by the stated timescales or the Secretary of State may issue a notice terminating the academy's funding agreement pursuant to clause 5.B to 5.E of the funding agreement for Stowmarket High School.

- The trust must agree to enter into a partnership with a school improvement partner under the Trust and School Improvement Offer. In doing so, the trust should consider a school improvement partner proposed by me or my team. Such arrangements should be entered into by 31 January 2024 and please inform me when this is confirmed. The trust must implement actions identified through the partnership. The trust must provide me with progress updates on the delivery of improvements identified. The first update is required by 28 March 2024 and after this, subsequent updates will be integrated into progress updates for the School Improvement Plan (referred to below).
- The trust, with support from the agreed school improvement partner, must provide an updated School Improvement Plan with clear milestones for improvement to my team. The plan must be provided on or before 28 February 2024. The plan and milestones will be subject to agreement by the Department. In relation to the above points from the Ofsted report, the School Improvement Plan should include areas not

sufficiently addressed in representations, in particular:

- How the curriculum will be embedded at the school and how implementation will be monitored.
 - How trust leaders will identify where teaching is less effective and how the training and support will enhance subject knowledge to ensure that pupils including those with SEND are fully supported to achieve well.
 - How the academy monitors absence and persistent absence and what actions are in place to improve attendance with the capacity needed at trust level to support this.
 - How the academy will ensure there are clear and robust policies and processes in place to consistently raise standards of behaviour, leading to reduced instances of disruption and poor behaviour.
- The trust must implement the agreed School Improvement Plan and provide termly updates on the agreed actions and milestones within the plan, including how any delays or risks are being addressed. These updates should explain how the trust board is monitoring progress and taking action to ensure improvements are sustained. The first update should be provided by 28 March 2024 and thereafter on the last day of each term. Progress updates will be reviewed by my team who will check to see if sufficient progress and improvements are being made.

I will monitor progress made towards meeting the Specified Actions. If the trust fails to meet any of the above Specified Actions by the specified dates, I will consider whether to terminate the academy's funding agreement in order to transfer the academy to an alternative trust.

I reserve the right to amend this Termination Warning Notice to specify further action which the trust must take, and the date by which it must be completed.

The trust must respond to this Termination Warning Notice by 8 January 2024 making any representations the trust wishes in response to this Termination Warning Notice and the above Specified Actions, or providing confirmation that the trust intends to comply with the above Specified Actions by the specified dates.

If the trust fails to respond to this Termination Warning Notice by 8 January 2024, I may issue a notice terminating the academy's funding agreement.

I realise that a new CEO and new Chair are now in post from when Ofsted inspected Stowmarket High School. I appreciate the trust's willingness to work with the department to secure the best outcomes for children at the academy.

I am copying this letter to Ofsted, and to Suffolk County Council. A copy of this letter will also be published on GOV.UK.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Duff
Regional Director
East of England, Regions Group

CC: Mike Sheridan, Regional Director, East of England and East Midlands,
Ofsted
Suzy Joyner, Interim Executive Director of Children's Services, Suffolk County
Council