



Department
for Education

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27th November 2023

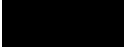
Dear 

Termination Warning Notice to the Members and Trustees of the Ascend Learning Trust in respect of Noremarsch Junior School

I notified the trust on 7th June 2023 that Noremarsch Junior School (“the Academy”) is not making necessary improvements.¹ On the same date I 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](#).

I refer to my letter of 19th October 2023. As stated in that letter, 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 therefore intended to issue a Termination Warning Notice.

In accordance with clauses 5B to 5.E of the supplemental funding agreement for the Academy, 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 trust.

I understand that  from my team spoke with you on 12th October 2023 to discuss this Termination Warning Notice and next steps. I recognise

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

the positive way in which the trust has engaged with my team and that the trust appears willing to work with the Department to address the concerns and make improvements to the Academy.

I understand that this Termination Warning Notice will come as a disappointment to the trust. The Academy has been part of the trust since October 2018. The Ofsted report in February 2023 was the first inspection since the Academy joined the trust, with the previous one being in November 2017 (which was assessed as Requires Improvement). There are some positive comments in the Ofsted inspection report of February 2023. In particular, the Academy's approach to safeguarding was reported as effective, with clear procedures in place, leaders acting quickly and pupils reporting that there are adults in school who they trust. In addition, adults are noted to support pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs well.

However, the report also highlights a number of concerns that require rapid and sustained improvement, as follows:

- *The reading curriculum is not well sequenced or ambitious. Expectations of what pupils, including pupils with SEND, can achieve are not high enough. As a result, pupils do not build knowledge well or reach ambitious end points. Leaders need to ensure that there is a clearly sequenced reading curriculum so that all pupils can read well and fulfil their potential.*
- *In some subjects in the wider curriculum, leaders have not identified the essential knowledge they want pupils to learn. This means that pupils do not build their knowledge well over time and there are gaps in what they know. Leaders need to identify the knowledge they want pupils to know and remember and then check their understanding.*
- *Teachers do not have consistently high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning. Consequently, some pupils do not take pride in their work and lose focus. Teachers must have high ambitions so that all pupils can produce high quality work and achieve well across the curriculum.*

The representations submitted by the trust unfortunately did not satisfy me that such improvements can be made. The Academy has been part of the trust for over 4 years and has not improved from Requires Improvement. In addition, the school improvement plan provided by the trust was incomplete and in draft form.

I therefore 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 supplemental funding agreement pursuant to clause 5E of the Academy's supplemental funding agreement.

- 1) *Submit a more complete, up to date version of the school improvement plan for assessment. Please submit this to my team by **Monday 8th January 2024** to obtain their agreement that it is credible, affordable,*

achievable and addresses the following weaknesses identified by Ofsted:

- Clarity that leaders have identified the essential knowledge they want pupils to learn across the curriculum.*
- A review of the reading curriculum to ensure that it is well sequenced and ambitious, including for SEND pupils.*
- Confirmation that the academy is taking action to ensure that leaders have increased expectations of pupils' attitudes towards learning and are ambitious for all pupils and the actions being taken are impactful.*

*Once the plan is agreed by the Department, to implement the plan and submit termly updates to my team on the actions and milestones within the plan (or other information as requested) and where there are delays or risks, to confirm how these are being addressed. The first update should be provided on or before **Thursday 8th February 2024** and thereafter on the last day of each term until further notice.*

*2) Commission an external review of the trust's governance arrangements to identify any gaps and recommendations for changes to lead to improvements at the Academy, including particularly the accountability mechanisms in place at the trust in ensuring improvement is enacted swiftly. To confirm that this has been commissioned by **Monday 8th January 2024**. Share the findings of the review and submit the trust's action plan in response to the review's recommendations by **Tuesday 27th February 2024**. The plan will be subject to agreement by the Department. Implement the agreed plan and provide me with termly updates on implementation. The first update should be provided on or before **Thursday 28th March 2024** and thereafter on the last day of each term until further notice.*

My team 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.

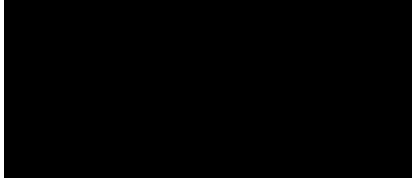
The trust must respond to this Termination Warning Notice by **Monday 18th December 2023** making any representations the trust wishes to make in response to this Termination Warning Notice and the above Specified Actions, or providing confirmation that the trust intends to comply with the above Specified Actions by the specified dates.

If the trust fails to respond to this Termination Warning Notice by Monday 18th December 2023, I may issue a notice terminating the Academy's supplemental funding agreement.

Once again, 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 Wiltshire Local Authority. A copy of this letter will also be published on GOV.UK.

Yours sincerely



CC: CEO

