



Department
for Education

Department for Education
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The Members and Trustees of Discovery Educational Trust
St Martin's School
Hanging Hill Lane
Brentwood
CM13 2HG

25 February 2025

Dear [REDACTED]

Termination Warning Notice to the Members and Trustees of the Discovery Educational Trust in respect of Chase High School

In accordance with sections 2A and 2D of the Academies Act 2010¹ any funding agreement of an academy may be terminated by the Secretary of State where special measures are required to be taken in relation to the academy or the academy requires significant improvement and the Chief Inspector of Ofsted has given notice of that under section 13(3)(a) of the Education Act 2005.

I received an Ofsted notification dated Monday 3 February 2025 confirming that Chase High School was judged to require special measures. For the reasons set out below, I now consider it necessary to issue this Termination Warning Notice.

The Ofsted report published on 11 February 2025 highlights the following areas of concern:

“The school has not embedded a strong culture of safeguarding. It does not follow its own policies for reporting safeguarding concerns and supporting pupils when they are at their most vulnerable. In particular, girls, including those in the sixth form, are at risk of harmful sexual behaviours. They do not feel safe. The school and the trust must ensure that all adults follow the expected procedures and report their concerns. The school must make sure that reported concerns are followed up. The school should also ensure that any victim of harmful behaviour is supported and that information that should be passed on to external agencies is done so swiftly.

Incidents of bullying and discriminatory behaviour are commonplace. Prejudicial language has become normalised as ‘banter’. Many cases go unreported because pupils do not have confidence that staff will act to resolve their concerns. This puts pupils at risk of harm. It also makes school an unpleasant place to be. The school must ensure that they secure a culture, where bullying and discriminatory behaviour are not tolerated. It must ensure that staff are suitably equipped to spot the signs of bullying and discrimination and then act with urgency to tackle such incidents.

The school does not accurately identify the needs of pupils with SEND. The information that it provides for teachers does not help them effectively adapt their teaching to address pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils with SEND do not learn the important knowledge that the school expects. The school and trust should ensure that the specific barriers to pupils' learning are identified accurately and that teachers have the expertise that they need to adapt their teaching.

Too often teaching, including in the sixth form, focuses on surface features and what is needed to answer an exam question. This results in pupils not learning the curriculum in the depth they should. Instead, they learn a series of disconnected facts and processes. Consequently, pupils do not learn well. They find it difficult to remember key information they have been taught. The school and the trust should ensure that teaching focuses on enabling pupils to develop a deep understanding of the knowledge identified as being important.

The school and those responsible for governors do not have an accurate understanding of the scale of the weaknesses at the school. They are too ready to excuse poor behaviour as a result of external factors. Their monitoring systems fail to identify deep-rooted shortcomings. This means that they do not act with sufficient urgency to take the actions that are needed to address these weaknesses. The school and the trust should ensure that their quality assurance processes identify the root cause of the issues in the school and that their improvement strategies are targeted to secure rapid and sustained improvement.

Those responsible for governance do not hold leaders to account with the necessary level of rigour. This means that they have not challenged the school about weaknesses in pupils' behaviour, safeguarding and the quality of education. Consequently, the trust has not ensured that pupils are safe, free from harassment and supported to achieve well. The trust must ensure that the trust board have the expertise to support and challenge the school to improve.”

As Regional Director, I need to be satisfied that the trust has capacity to deliver rapid and sustainable improvement at the academy. If I am not satisfied that this can be achieved, I will consider whether to terminate the funding agreement in order to transfer the academy to an alternative academy trust.

In making the decision on whether to terminate the funding agreement I will consider any written representations the trust wish to make in response to this Termination Warning Notice.

The trust has already provided some assurances about the safeguarding concerns raised in Ofsted's provisional judgment. However, I would be grateful if any representations the trust wishes to make includes how it is addressing Ofsted's finding that the school has not embedded a strong culture of safeguarding.

Please provide me with any representations the trust wish to make by Tuesday 18 March 2025.

We are mindful of creating unnecessary pressures on school leaders and staff, and as such we would ask the trust to ensure that the appropriate provision is in place to support the school workforce.

I am copying this letter to Ofsted and Southend on Sea City Council. A copy of this letter will also be published on GOV.UK.

Your sincerely,



Jonathan Duff

Regional Director for the East of England

CC:

Mike Sheridan, Regional Director East of England and East Midlands - Ofsted,
Michael Marks, Executive Director for Children and Public Health - Southend on Sea
City Council