



Department  
for Education

Regional Director's Office  
Regions Group North East  
Bishopsgate House  
Feethams  
Darlington  
DL1 5QE

The Members and Trustees of Northern Lights Learning Trust  
Northern Lights Learning Trust  
Benedict Biscop Church Of England Academy  
Marcross Drive,  
Moorside,  
Sunderland,  
SR3 2RE

Tuesday 25 March 2025

Dear Ms Hammond

**Termination Warning Notice to the Members and Trustees of Northern Lights Learning Trust ("the Trust") in the respect of Venerable Bede Church of England Academy**

In accordance with clauses 5F to 5H of the funding agreement for Venerable Bede Church of England Academy ("the Academy") the Secretary of State may terminate the funding agreement if the Chief Inspector gives notice to the Academy Trust that special measures are required to be taken in relation to the Academy or the Academy requires significant improvement.

I received an Ofsted notification dated February 24<sup>th</sup> 2025 confirming that Venerable Bede Church of England Academy was judged to have serious weaknesses.

I am aware of the progress that Northern Lights Learning Trust has made at Venerable Bede and that the Ofsted report recognises this in the report.

- This school has undergone considerable positive change of late. Several leaders are new to their posts. Serious concerns about pupils' behaviour, attitudes to learning and attendance are being successfully addressed. Some pupils now attend school more regularly and have an increasingly positive approach to their studies.
- The school is ambitious for everyone who attends to share its vision to 'Soar to the heights together'. Staff are proud to work at the school and share good relationships with pupils. Significant staff absence in the past has impacted negatively on the school's journey of improvement. Pupils are now taught by specialist staff who know them well. Most pupils have an adult they would ask

for help. Bullying has reduced at the school. Pupils mostly conduct themselves in an orderly way.

However, the Ofsted report highlights a number of areas for improvement and for the reasons set out below, a Termination Warning Notice will be issued.

- The school's curriculum has not been well implemented over time. This is, in part, due to high levels of staff absence. However, it is also due to some staff not checking what pupils know and can do before setting new learning. As a result, pupils do not have a secure understanding of what they have been taught.
- Pupils do not have a secure understanding of important subject-specific vocabulary and terminology. Staff do not focus on this important information in some lessons. Some pupils cannot read, write and communicate as well as they should be able to.
- Over time, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have not gained the skills and knowledge they require to succeed in external tests and assessments. Therefore, pupils are not well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough or meet the school's high expectations for conduct. This is because the positive ethos and culture created by the school is not embedded among a significant minority of pupils.
- Pupils do not have a secure understanding of the school's personal, social and health education curriculum. In particular, knowledge of parliamentary democracy, a wide range of world faiths and the protected characteristics are not embedded among pupils. This limits how well prepared they are to live in, and contribute to, modern British society.

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.

Please provide me with any representations the trust wish to make by Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 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, Sunderland Local Authority and the CoE Diocese of Durham and Newcastle. A copy of this letter will also be published on GOV.UK.

Yours sincerely



**Katherine Cowell**  
**Regional Director, North East**

CC:

Mr Simon Marshall Director of Children's Services / Chief Executive : Sunderland LA.

Mr David Akers Director of Education : CoE Diocese of Durham and Newcastle.

Ms Katrina Gueli Regional Director : Ofsted