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Dame Maureen Brennan  
The Executive Headteacher  
The Mirus Academy  
Leamore Lane  
Bloxwich  
Walsall,  
WS2 7NR

Dear Dame Maureen

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Mirus Academy**

Following my visit with Denah Jones Her Majesty's Inspector and Cliff Mainey and Joseph Skivington, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 16 and 17 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers in the secondary phase unless a significant part of their time would be spent teaching at one of the other academies in the Matrix Academy Trust.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Walsall and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good for all pupils in all years by making sure that all teachers:
  - match work to the different ability levels in their class
  - use additional adults well to support pupils with special educational needs and other pupils needing additional support
  - give clear and specific feedback that helps pupils to understand how to improve their written work, and then make sure that pupils act on this advice.
- Ensure that all pupils make at least good progress so that the standards they reach, particularly in English and mathematics, by the end of Key Stage 4 are at least equal to national averages. Do this by ensuring that:
  - academy leaders recruit subject specialist teachers to any vacancies that exist or occur
  - teachers of English and mathematics use their skills and knowledge to provide specific and expert support to raise attainment in each year group
  - pupils in all year groups have consistently good opportunities to develop and then use their reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills in all subjects
  - pupils, particularly in Years 7 to 11, are taught the skills necessary to be independent learners and then have the opportunity to use these skills in lessons.
- Improve pupils' behaviour so that it is consistently good or better in lessons and around the academy by:
  - implementing strategies to tackle the poor behaviour of a significant minority of older pupils and therefore reduce the number of exclusions from school to below the national average
  - making sure that all pupils experience teaching that engages and motivates them so that they have better attitudes to learning in lessons
  - making sure that all members of staff have high expectations of good behaviour in lessons and around the academy, that these are communicated clearly to pupils and that all teachers are consistent in their management of poor behaviour.
- Increase attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent to at least national averages by working with parents, carers and external agencies.
- Improve leadership so that it enables pupils to achieve well by:
  - improving the quality of teaching across all years and all subjects to at least good and making sure that all teachers appointed have the necessary subject knowledge
  - making sure that leaders of English and mathematics take responsibility for improving pupils' achievement in these two subjects in all years

- ensuring that there are leaders in post who have the expertise, time and capacity to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across all phases in subjects other than English and mathematics
- consistently making judgements on the quality of teaching that take into account how well pupils are making progress
- tackling weaknesses in the provision for supporting pupils with special educational needs
- increasing the effectiveness with which leaders at all levels analyse the academy's work to identify what is working well and how improvements can be made
- leaders, including governors, making sure that the pupil premium funding is used to make a significant and sustained difference to the achievement of those groups of pupils it is intended to support
- making sure that the sponsor and governors only commission external support that provides accurate evaluations of the academy's position
- making sure that the independent external review of governance is completed quickly and that this review includes a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the associate headteacher of the primary phase, senior leaders from the Mirus and the Matrix Academy Trust, middle leaders, staff, groups of pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body and two other members. Inspectors spent the majority of their time looking at provision and outcomes in Years 7 to 11. The sixth form was not evaluated during this inspection.

### **Context**

The previous Interim Principal left the academy shortly before the end of the spring term. The sponsorship of the academy by the Walsall College Academy Trust also ceased at this time. The academy is now sponsored by the Matrix Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust that includes two other secondary academies. The governing body has been reconstituted and the majority of the governors, including the Chair, are new. Two previous parent governors have joined the new governing body. The executive headteacher took on her role at the start of the summer term and spends the majority of each week at the Mirus. Three other senior leaders from the Matrix are working at the academy for all or most of the time. Since the previous inspection four teachers and 10 support staff have left the academy and three teachers and seven support staff have joined.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Provisional outcomes for 2015 indicate that there are once again improvements at Key Stages 1 and 2. These are particularly marked in mathematics and writing. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is likely to be in line with last year's national averages. In writing, three pupils have gained a Level 6, which is an excellent achievement. Overall, the academy's assessment information, some of which has already been externally moderated, indicates that by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have made progress that is better than that expected nationally. At Key Stage 1, pupils' phonics (the sounds that letters make) skills have improved, and this is reflected in their test scores. More children are now reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception than in previous years.

Assessment information at the secondary phase of the academy is too unreliable to give any useful information about how well pupils are doing in different subjects. However, the work in pupils' books and their learning in lessons indicate that overall achievement in the secondary phase remains inadequate. There is no way of knowing how well Year 11 pupils are likely to do in their examinations this summer. The new and substantive leaders and many teachers are working hard with pupils to remedy issues such as lost or incomplete coursework. As reported previously, some

pupils in each year group are doing well in some subjects, but this is far too piecemeal. Poor attendance continues to have a severely adverse effect on many pupils' achievement.

### **The quality of teaching**

Assessment information and the work in pupils' books indicate that, at the primary phase, pupils continue to benefit from plenty of good teaching.

In the secondary phase, the variable picture of teaching reported at the time of the previous monitoring inspection remains.

Too much teaching is still not good enough to enable pupils to make the rapid progress they need to in order to catch up and to achieve well. Gaps in staffing continue to affect pupils' learning. Weak learning skills, especially among Year 7 pupils, have a very negative impact on their learning. Pupils are not confident in their own abilities, so quickly ask for help. They have little patience to wait for a response, so then call out. Teachers often respond quickly and try to help them, rather than giving them strategies to help themselves, such as seeking help from a peer or checking instructions. In the meantime, other pupils stop working, so learning slows. Conversely, at other times pupils wait too long for help with work that is too difficult or confusing for them. This is not the case in all lessons. In the best examples, teachers have clearly taught the pupils good learning strategies, and remind them how to use them.

Good teaching continues to shine through. New leaders have rightly recognised the need to capitalise on the strong teaching as a matter of urgency.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour and attitudes to learning in the primary phase continue to be good. Pupils are proud of their work, enthusiastic and highly motivated. They listen to their teachers and work and play well together. The academy is a calm and pleasant environment. Overall attendance is below the national average, but the majority of pupils attend well.

In the secondary phase, pupils' behaviour in lessons during the inspection ranged from rude and disruptive to compliant, but largely uninterested to motivated and enthusiastic. As noted above, too often poor behaviour, weak management of behaviour, or a combination of the two, disrupt learning. Some pupils commented to inspectors that they are thoroughly fed up with this situation. Those who want to work hard and to learn feel that the behaviour of others too often gets in their way.

A number of pupils said that they think the new leaders have started to make the academy 'stricter' and that this is a good thing. Several commented that rules and

expectations are clearer. One noted, 'Mrs Brennan has a no-nonsense approach.' Others shared this view. Many pupils are loyal to the academy and are keen to embrace any changes that might improve their school life. However others, particularly some of the older pupils, feel that they have been let down by too many changes and are not yet ready to believe that things might get better.

Exclusions have risen this term and are high. This is because the new leaders have drawn a 'line in the sand' in order to make it clear that certain behaviours will no longer be tolerated. Leaders are working hard to secure the support of parents in reinforcing this message. All parents are expected to come into the academy for a reintegration meeting if their child has been excluded, but not all do. Attendance continues to be very low and has been further affected by the rise in exclusions. The attendance of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is particularly poor.

Fewer pupils are now at alternative provision or on a part-time timetable and are back in the academy full time. This is a positive move for these pupils, but is currently presenting its own problems as some are finding it difficult to conform to settle back into a school routine.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The executive headteacher has quickly and astutely analysed the issues in the academy. Crucially, she has recognised the strengths and loyalty that exist among leaders, teaching and support staff, and is determined to maximise these strengths as a matter of priority. She has taken a range of practical steps to remedy some immediate problems, for example with the curriculum plans for September and the completion of Year 11 BTEC courses. She is carefully establishing the new senior leadership team in order to blend the skills of the current leaders with those of the Matrix Academy Trust leaders for the maximum benefit of the academy.

Matrix leaders in the secondary phase have been carefully deployed both to work on practical aspects of academy life and to gain an accurate baseline of teaching, learning and behaviour. They have already established a presence around the academy and have a realistic view of the extent of the work to be done. They are building positive relationships with staff, pupils and parents. Substantive leaders are tackling some of the urgent work that needs completion, such as timetabling and supporting staff with their most challenging classes. Work has begun with curriculum leaders to enable them to become more influential and effective in their roles.

The executive headteacher quickly realised that pupils had not been given sufficient guidance and support in finding suitable destinations post-16. Time and expertise have now been dedicated to this aspect. As a result, 90% of Year 11 pupils now have a planned destination, a significant improvement on the situation in May, and the other 10% are being helped as a matter of priority.

The primary phase of the academy continues to be well led and managed and is constantly improving. A deputy headteacher of the primary phase has been appointed to start in September.

The new governing body is already committed to improving the academy at the necessary rate. The Chair and new members are very experienced governors who bring with them a valuable range of skills to complement those of the parent governors. Their initial visit to the academy gave them a realistic picture of the issues that exist with the academy's ethos and the behaviour of the pupils.

### **External support**

All support for the academy is coming from within the Matrix Academy Trust. Skilled support is being provided for teaching, finance and careers advice for pupils.