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**Jo Morgan HMI**  
Regional Director, North West

Dear Gani

## **Salford local authority area focused inspection programme – 2 June to 30 June 2014**

I am writing to inform you of the outcomes of the inspections and telephone survey carried out across Salford during the focused period of 2 June to 30 June 2014.

As you are aware, Ofsted is focusing some of its inspection activity in local authorities where we have concerns about the relatively low proportion of good and outstanding schools. In recent meetings between Ofsted and senior education colleagues in Salford, it was agreed that too many children and young people in Salford are not yet receiving a good or outstanding education.

The focused inspection approach, coupled with the outcomes of a telephone survey of a sample of school leaders about their perception of the support and challenge from the local authority, has enabled us to obtain a clearer picture of the education provided for children and young people in Salford, and your role in supporting improvement.

### **Outline of focused inspection activities**

We inspected 13 primary schools, three secondary schools and one special school. Four of the schools are sponsored academies.

During the inspections, lead inspectors gathered information on the use, quality and impact of local authority support by asking the following additional questions of headteachers and governors:

1. How well does the local authority know your school, your performance and the standards your pupils achieve?
2. What measures are in place to support and challenge your school and how do these meet the needs of your school?
3. What is the impact of the local authority support and challenge over time to help your school improve?
4. What more could the local authority do to make your school even better?

In addition, telephone discussions took place with the headteachers of eight secondary schools and 12 primary schools. These leaders were asked the same four questions.

### **Inspection outcomes**

Of the 17 schools inspected as part of the focused inspection activity:

- one was judged to be outstanding
- nine were judged to be good; seven of these had improved a grade and two were a first inspection
- six were judged to require improvement: two of the schools were previously judged satisfactory; two declined a grade and two were inspected for the first time.
- one was judged to require special measures; this is a sponsored academy that previously had been judged to be satisfactory.

One school was judged as outstanding for the second time and seven schools improved their overall effectiveness and are now providing a good standard of education; all of these were a re-inspection following a 'requires improvement' judgement. Although only one of the schools inspected was judged to be outstanding overall, the leadership and management of two other schools were judged to be outstanding. The overall effectiveness grade of three of the schools inspected, one of which is an academy, declined from their previous inspection judgements.

The inspections provided some examples of effective intervention and support from the local authority. Of the 17 schools inspected, 15 reported that the level of support and intervention from the local authority had been effective. As one headteacher reported, 'The school improvement officer has provided regular contact with the school, including frequent visits to provide in-depth checks on progress and effective guidance for leaders and governors'. There was a clear correlation between the local authority's categorisation of schools, including academies, and the level of support and intervention noted by inspectors. The general consensus from the schools inspected is that the local authority knows its schools well and has improved the timeliness and rigour of both its intervention and support strategies.

## Survey responses

Responses to the additional questions asked of those 17 schools inspected during the focused period and the 20 schools contacted by telephone were analysed. A summary of the findings is detailed below.

## Strengths

- The vast majority of headteachers have confidence in the leadership of the local authority's arrangements to promote school improvement. They consider that the authority knows its schools very well and is making effective use of its school improvement resources. Headteachers support the local authority's categorisation of schools system and the need for proportionate intervention according to situation. Several schools commented that there is a clear vision for Salford from the local authority which includes high expectations of its school leaders.
- Schools are particularly positive about the local authority's improved use of data through its annual review of each school's performance. The information provided now includes an examination of the performance of individual groupings such as free school meals and vulnerable groups. Several headteachers commented that conversations with their linked local authority officer about performance data had led to a much sharper focus on school improvement planning with measurable outcomes.
- Most schools have welcomed the challenge from the local authority, even though this may have been uncomfortable. One headteacher observed that, 'support and challenge has been well received and has led to rapid and significant improvement particularly in the governance of the school'. The vast majority of headteachers felt that local authority officers were readily accessible and that each linked officer had a real understanding of the individual school context, enabling effective support and challenge.
- There was overwhelming support for the local authority's approach to developing supportive school networks at both secondary and primary level. The Schools Provider Arm (SPA), led by strong and effective leaders from good and outstanding schools, is working effectively to support a family of schools and this is encouraging a self-sustaining and self-improving system in Salford.
- The secondary headteachers report that their association has improved significantly, particularly in the promotion of collaborative working based on mutual trust. A good example of this is the 'in-year fair access panel' which is an agreement between all secondary schools on how to better accommodate hard-to-place youngsters within Salford.
- Schools have welcomed the training and support provided by the local authority for new headteachers and for newly qualified teachers as part of their induction.
- Support provided for governance is positively received. Governors spoke highly of the support they had from governor services. Training is highly

regarded. Headteachers commented on how this has helped governors to hold them and their schools to account more effectively. The local authority has successfully set up interim strategic groups, which have led to improved governance in those schools which require significant improvement.

- The local authority has a positive relationship with most of its academy schools, including being part of the governance arrangements in some circumstances.
- The local authority's human resources and finance services are valued highly by most schools. The knowledgeable help offered to schools regarding staff recruitment was mentioned by several school leaders.
- Headteachers note the high quality of the support and training they receive when they request this on specific issues, such as behaviour management and safeguarding.
- The local authority has brokered effective senior leadership support when this has been required for specific schools.
- Some headteachers, whose schools have been judged to require improvement, welcomed the support they had received including work on quality assurance, leadership development and lesson observation training.

### **Areas for development**

- The development of cluster arrangements and school-to-school improvement networks among the primary sector is not as strong as in the secondary sector.
- Across both primary and secondary schools, leaders are now more aware of the performance of vulnerable groups, but some of the schools inspected had not transferred this knowledge into tangible strategies to help narrow any gaps in performance.
- The local authority is doing well in helping the majority of its 'requires improvement' schools to become 'good'. However, in the recent inspections a couple of schools had not improved as well as they might and performance had plateaued or declined. A review of these schools may identify if 'early indicators' of a dip in performance were missed by the local authority and whether there are lessons to be learnt in order to shape future operating models.

### **Summary**

The focused inspection programme has demonstrated and reflected the improving trend within Salford schools generally. The proportion of 'satisfactory' or 'requiring improvement' schools moving to an overall effectiveness judgement of good has risen. The headteachers and governors of the schools inspected commented positively about the level of challenge and support they had received from the local authority either directly or through effective networking arrangements. A few schools did not improve from their previous inspection grade and there will be lessons to be learnt from this. Similarly, two schools declined an overall effectiveness grade and this remains a cause for concern.

The telephone survey responses present a clear view from headteachers of the quality and impact of the support and challenge provided by the local authority. Responses from schools were overwhelmingly positive. The views of secondary headteachers and governors, although similar to those of their primary counterparts, were stronger on the school-to-school networking arrangements facilitated by the local authority.

There is general agreement that the local authority knows its schools well. There is strong evidence that officers are effectively challenging and supporting schools in proportion to need. The local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement are robust and regularly reviewed. Its strategy of introducing and encouraging collaborative support networks so schools can share best practice and help each other is working well, particularly in the secondary sector.

I hope these observations are useful as you seek to further improve the quality of education for the children and young people of Salford. My regional Senior Her Majesty's Inspector, and my Her Majesty's Inspector colleagues, welcome the positive way you, your senior colleagues, and schools, are engaging with Ofsted.

Please pass on my sincere thanks to the headteachers, governors and local authority officers who gave their time to talk to our inspectors during the focused inspection period.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jo Morgan", with a long, sweeping tail.

**Jo Morgan HMI**  
Regional Director, North West