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Mrs Mary Jane Edwards, CEO
Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust
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Dear Mrs Edwards

Focused review of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust

Following the focused review of six of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT) schools in February and March 2018, and the subsequent follow-up visit by Christine Dick and Kim Hall, Her Majesty's Inspectors, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the review findings.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the Trust between 13 and 15 March 2018. Please pass on our thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

The findings from the focused review and a wider consideration of the Trust's overall performance are set out below.

Summary of main findings

- DNEAT's performance over time, including the outcomes of the most recent focused inspections, reflects the journey of an improving multi-academy trust (MAT).
- Your appointment as chief executive officer in September 2017 underpins a tenacious determination to improve outcomes for all pupil groups. You have made a significant difference in a relatively short space of time.
- You, your senior leaders and trustees are clear that, in the past, the Trust's actions to address some important areas in need of improvement were too slow.
- You know that, during the early stages of the Trust's evolution, the rate of school improvement was too variable. Leadership capacity was too limited to cope with the rapid expansion as new schools joined.

- The appointment of the academy group executive principals (AGEPs) in 2016 marked a turning point in securing centrally led accountability.
- Since your own appointment as chief executive officer, you have built on previous successes and sustained a relentless focus on improving the quality of education.
- Within the revised accountability model, operationally led by the academies improvement director (AID), the unique characteristics of each school are recognised and valued.
- Together, you have established strong central leadership and a culture of collaborative learning. While this approach gives school leaders appropriate autonomy, it is structured within well-considered and rigorously applied monitoring and review systems.
- Leadership changes in schools and the further growth of expertise within the central team, including through the secondment of a specialist in early years, continue to secure the foundations of a strong learning community.
- Appropriate specialist support is brokered separately for the Trust's only secondary school. There are few opportunities for secondary school staff to share good practice with teams from other Trust schools and from different key stages.
- While overall outcomes for Trust pupils are still variable, the trend demonstrates an upward trajectory, in particular for pupils by the end of key stage 2.
- You know that disadvantaged pupils made significantly less progress than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally, in 2016 and 2017, in all key stages. The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, did not achieve as well as they should.
- The published 2017 national test results suggest that new improvement strategies are working, in particular for the most able pupils by the end of key stage 2.
- Children in the early years do not yet make consistently good progress in all areas of the curriculum. Appropriate plans are now in place to share good practice more widely and to raise standards further.
- Other Trust-wide development priorities include the need to continue to improve the teaching of phonics and writing in the Reception Year.
- Previously, overall attendance was below the national average and persistent absence rates were too high. Current attendance rates are improving. The rate of persistent absence is now closer to the national figure.
- The central business team provides very effective business support for schools. While judicious use of resources offers value for money and economies of scale, cost savings are well grounded in senior leaders' commitment to improving life chances for all DNEAT pupils.
- Within a landscape of national and local challenges in teacher recruitment, retention and supply, you have entrenched the mantra of 'growing your own'

teaching teams. Vacant posts are offered not just as jobs, but as career development opportunities. There are currently very few gaps across the Trust's workforce.

Evidence

Focused inspections of six schools were carried out between 27 February and 7 March 2018. Three of these inspections were short inspections carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The other three inspections were full inspections under section 5 of the Act.

The inspection outcomes were:

- In the full inspections undertaken as part of the focused review, all three schools were judged to be good.
- In the short inspections, two schools remained good. The third school retained the previous good judgement but was recommended for a full section 5 inspection because of a recent decline in standards in the early years and in key stage 1.

Telephone discussions were held on 8, 9 and 12 March 2018 with headteachers and/or executive headteachers of 12 other schools in the Trust. During the follow-up visit to the Trust offices, discussions were held with senior leaders and operational staff, governors, trustees, strategic partners and other stakeholders. A range of relevant documentation was also scrutinised by inspectors.

Context

DNEAT comprises 30 schools. Of these schools, 29 are primary schools. The other school provides secondary education for pupils aged 11 to 18. Almost all schools are located in Norfolk; one is in Suffolk. The 30 schools that make up the Trust are part of the wider diocesan group of 111 schools.

The Trust was initially established with one school in autumn 2013, with a further two schools joining in the same academic year. In the two years that followed, the Trust grew rapidly, with 12 schools joining in 2014-15 and a further 15 schools in 2015-16. Bishop's Church of England Primary School was the most recent school to join, in November 2016.

There are six federations of schools, led by executive headteachers. The Trust's schools are now organised into regions. Each region is led by an AGEP. This regional tier of leadership was established in 2016. Within the Trust schools there are 14 sponsor-led academies and 16 academy converters.

Main findings

Currently, the inspection outcomes for the Trust's academies, including the most recent focused inspections, are as follows:

- one school was judged to be outstanding
- 17 schools were judged to be good
- five schools were judged to require improvement
- one school was judged inadequate
- six schools are yet to be inspected since joining the Trust; of these, two of the predecessor schools were judged to require improvement, and the other four predecessor schools were judged to be inadequate.

You took up your post as chief executive officer on 1 September 2017. This was a promotion from your previous AGEF role. High expectations, coupled with a strong focus on accountability, secured in a cohesive and well-supported learning community, are symptomatic of the foundations that you have laid to facilitate rapid improvement.

While recognising the early imbalance between values and standards, the Trust is fully committed to serving its community, and aims to provide an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. This strong sense of moral purpose is now fuelled further by the ambition to make a significant difference to improving life chances for all pupil groups and to prepare them well for the next stage in their education.

Within the family of Trust schools, each provider's unique characteristics are valued and encouraged. Working together, there is a clear sense of direction, at all levels, reflected through the DNEAT's vision and goals, which are shared consistently.

Governance arrangements are effective, well-managed and quality-assured through the central team's governance manager. Universally, headteachers speak positively about the high-quality training, support and challenge, in appropriate measures, for local governing bodies. Schemes of delegation are clear and published to school websites. Roles and responsibilities are well understood.

The AID works effectively with the highly committed and skilled team of AGEFs to offer bespoke support, based on regular monitoring, review and effective challenge to school leaders. Together, you have established an impressive and in-depth understanding of what is going well and what needs to improve.

Quality-assurance systems are systematic and thorough. High levels of consistency are evident in improvement planning and monitoring routines across schools. For example, single change plans, 'school on a page' and other performance documentation are scrutinised in regular academy improvement reviews (AIRs). These meetings track previous successes, the areas that need to improve and the

next steps needed, resulting in cyclic and appropriately detailed reports to governors and trustees.

Assigned Trust leaders now attend the AIRs, alongside headteachers, the chair of the local governing body and the relevant AGEPS. This means that Trust members now have first-hand access to current performance information, which strengthens further their ability to offer direct support and challenge to leaders in schools and across the central team.

In securing the foundations of previous structures, you are ensuring that the AGEPS provide high-quality support in the sub-regions that they oversee. A significant strength of the more recent changes is evidenced through the growing team of subject and aspect ambassadors. This team continues to build capacity by offering school-to-school support and making best use of the good practice that exists across Trust schools.

Working together, you have ensured that the Trust-wide, in-year assessment model sustains a strong focus on establishing a secure understanding of what pupils do well and what they need to improve.

Cross-school teams work with AGEPS and external partners, including the local authority, to ensure that the judgements teachers make about the quality of pupils' work are similar to those made in other schools. This systematic approach has ensured that the accuracy of teachers' assessment has continued to improve as teachers become increasingly adept at using the information they hold.

The wealth of knowledge now available is combining to give Trust leaders and school staff the tools they need to continue to improve the quality of provision across subjects, year groups and key stages. Importantly, this approach is proving increasingly effective in honing teachers' skills in the classroom. More widely, this knowledge is deepening their understanding of the learning needs of pupils taught in mixed-age classes and the expectations of what pupils should achieve by each key point of transition.

Although the progress of current pupils is improving, in 2016 and 2017 pupils made less progress than other pupils nationally between key stages 1 and 2 and key stages 2 and 4. Trust leaders acknowledge that outcomes have not improved quickly enough across the Trust's schools over time.

In 2017, at key stage 1, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard was above, or in line with, the national average in all subjects. The proportion of pupils who achieved greater depth in each of reading, writing and mathematics was lower than the national figure.

The proportion of children reaching a good level of development in the early years was below the national average. This was also the case in the Year 1 national phonics testing.

At key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was well below the national figure. Nevertheless, although from a low baseline, pupils' outcomes in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 represent a clear improvement on the previous year. The proportion of pupils achieving at the higher standard in the combined measure of reading, writing and mathematics has also improved and is now in line with the national figure.

In the Trust's secondary school, standards at the end of key stage 4 declined sharply in 2017. Pupils made significantly less progress than other pupils nationally in GCSE examinations.

Although the differences are diminishing, disadvantaged pupils' progress and attainment scores remain below the national figure across all key stages.

Trust leaders are crystal clear in the knowledge that outcomes for all pupil groups need to improve at a faster rate than previously. High-quality systems now ensure that trustees and governors are increasingly well informed about the quality of education that each school provides.

Recent inspections of Trust schools and Trust-wide assessment information reflect a positive pattern of ongoing change. Pupils are making better progress because the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. High-level ambition and raised expectations are at the heart of this cultural shift.

Trust leaders have risen to the challenge of ensuring that all pupils attend regularly in response to some variable patterns of attendance across schools. As a result, in 2017, 21 schools maintained or improved attendance levels in line with, or close to, the national average. This trend of improvement is continuing and a further seven schools' attendance rates are now closer to the national figure this year. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is also declining.

The rate of fixed-term exclusions is reducing significantly in the few Trust schools where previously this figure was too high. New initiatives, including some focused project work with the local authority, aim to reduce even further the number of pupils who are temporarily excluded. Recently introduced training for governors is strengthening the level of challenge they offer to school leaders in cases where exclusion is proposed but not yet completed.

The primary curriculum is tailored to meet pupils' needs and the context of each individual school. While headteachers have the autonomy to develop their own school's plan, close checks are made on the differences that curriculum planning is

making to improving pupils' outcomes over time. Where necessary, adaptations are made in consultation with Trust leaders, based on other expertise available from within the Trust or advice available from external partners. For example, in one school, an external audit of provision has led to an increasing focus on the wider curriculum beyond English and mathematics. This is recognised by leaders as an important tool in raising standards further across subjects.

The Trust offers an extensive range of professional development opportunities using expertise from within, for example through subject ambassadors, and also from external partners, including the local authority. Sessions cover the needs and interests of all staff teams, including non-teaching staff.

Specialist support is brokered for the single secondary school in the Trust. This includes leadership mentoring for the acting principal. However, the extent to which the secondary school teams are involved in wider-Trust professional development is more limited. Senior leaders recognise that there is more to do to share the good practice identified in teaching, learning and assessment, across the different phases of education, from the early years to the end of key stage 4.

Headteachers speak highly of the value added to their provision through becoming part of the family of Trust schools. In the focused telephone calls, they commented frequently on the effective business management support from the central team. They told inspectors that this frees up time so that they can focus on improving the quality of provision in their schools. Collectively, they were unequivocal in their endorsement of the high-quality training available to them. A significant proportion of headteachers also said that this level of whole-school professional development would be 'out of reach' under different arrangements. While they know that expectations are high and the challenge to improve is strong, they feel that Trust leaders 'listen' and make appropriate changes in line with their feedback.

Acknowledging the challenges in recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce, together with other senior leaders, you have established the foundations for becoming an 'employer of choice'. Examples of actions taken include career development plans which enhance job opportunities, 'growing your own' and improving links with teacher training providers. These actions are paving the way for continuing success in this aspect of the Trust's work. A new initiative, working with another MAT, aims to introduce the teaching apprenticeship scheme to develop suitably qualified teaching assistants into a full teaching role.

Safeguarding

Senior leaders at all levels place a high priority on keeping children safe. Safeguarding records, the outcomes of this focused review and other recent inspections confirm that child protection arrangements are secure. Policies and procedures are regularly updated in line with the most recent guidance. Schools value the rigour of the Trust's safeguarding framework which helps them to be

confident that they are compliant with relevant legislation. Local governing bodies, as well as trustees, are effective in holding school leaders to account for pupils' safety across Trust schools.

The Trust's regular checks and routine audits ensure that monitoring is thorough and is making a difference. Swift action is taken to eliminate any safeguarding concerns and to protect vulnerable pupils. The detailed analysis of safeguarding information leads to effective interventions and any further staff training needed relevant to the context of the individual pupils and schools. This is a particular strength of the Trust's work. Safeguarding records are meticulously maintained through the central team.

Close work with external agencies, including the local authority, helps to raise further leaders' awareness of the context of the safeguarding needs within the diverse communities that the Trust's schools serve.

Recommendations

- Ensure that outcomes in Trust schools continue to improve for all groups of pupils, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils.
- Further improve provision in the early years and in the teaching of early reading so that it is of consistently high quality across Trust schools.
- Continue to build the capacity for high-quality school-to-school support across the full range of subjects.
- Ensure the good practice that exists in teaching, learning and assessment is more widely shared across the early years, primary and secondary phases of education in the Trust's schools.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of the trust

Trust schools inspected as part of the focused review – section 5 inspections

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Inspection grade, February/March 2018
St Michael's Church of England Academy	Norfolk	March 2015	Predecessor school; Good	Good
Peterhouse Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2015	Predecessor school; Requires improvement	Good
Swaffham Church of England Junior Academy	Norfolk	February 2015	Predecessor school; Inadequate; Special measures	Good

Trust schools inspected as part of the focused review – section 8 short inspections

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Inspection grade, February/March 2018
Sculthorpe Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	December 2015	Good	Good
Gillingham St Michael's Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2015	Good	Good
St Peter and St Paul Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	February 2015	Good	Good

Trust schools that were part of the focused telephone calls on 8, 9 and 12 March 2018

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection judgement
Kessingland Church of England Primary Academy	Suffolk	September 2014	Inadequate; Special measures	July 2017 Requires improvement
Whitefriars Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	September 2014	Outstanding	May 2017 Good
Gooderstone Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2015	Outstanding	November 2016 Requires Improvement
Mundford Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	December 2014	Good	March 2014 Good
Weasenham Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	June 2016	Good	January 2014 Good
St Peter's Church of England Primary Academy, Easton	Norfolk	March 2016	Good	October 2012 Outstanding
St Andrew's Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2016	Predecessor school; Inadequate; Serious weakness	Not inspected since joining the MAT
Castle Acre Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2016	Predecessor school; Inadequate; Serious weakness	Not inspected since joining the MAT
Narborough Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2016	Predecessor school; Inadequate; Serious weakness	Not inspected since joining the MAT
Sporle Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2016	Predecessor school;	Not inspected since joining the MAT

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection judgement
			Inadequate; Serious weakness	
Rudham Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	June 2016	Good	May 2014 Good
The Open Academy (11 to 18 secondary school)	Norfolk	September 2014	Requires improvement	April 2015 Good

Other Trust schools

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection judgement
Thomas Bullock Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	November 2014	Predecessor school; Requires improvement	September 2017 Requires improvement
Fritcham Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	July 2014	Outstanding	April 2017 Good
Ditchingham Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	February 2014	Predecessor school; Requires improvement	November 2016 Requires improvement
Middleton Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	February 2015	Predecessor school; Requires improvement	October 2016 Inadequate; Special measures
Moorlands Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	November 2013	Inadequate; Special measures	September 2016 Requires Improvement
Bishop's Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	November 2016	Predecessor school; Requires improvement	Not inspected since joining the MAT
Dereham Church of England Junior Academy	Norfolk	November 2015	Predecessor school Requires improvement	Not inspected since joining the MAT
Cawston Church of England	Norfolk	September 2016	Requires improvement	May 2016 Good

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection judgement
Primary Academy				
Hockering Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2016	Good	April 2013 Good
Great Witchingham Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	March 2016	Requires improvement	November 2013 Good
Colkirk Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	December 2015	Requires improvement	June 2013 Good
West Raynham Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	December 2015	Outstanding	November 2012 Good