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Dear Ms Owen

### **Summary evaluation of L.E.A.D. Academy Trust**

Following the summary evaluation of Lead. Empower. Achieve. Drive. (L.E.A.D.) Academy Trust ('the trust') in July 2019, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the trust on 1 to 3 July 2019, when I was accompanied by David Carter, SHMI, and Deborah Mosley, HMI. Please pass on our thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

The findings from the summary evaluation and a wider consideration of the trust's overall performance are set out below.

### **Summary of main findings**

- Children are at the heart of the trust's principles, visions and values. This commitment to putting children first is evident in the decisions made and recorded at trustee- and executive-management levels. It is an ethos that permeates through to academies' local governance, leadership and staff. The collective conviction and determination to live this ethos is reflected in headteacher comments such as, 'We are proud to be part of the L.E.A.D. team,' and 'We wanted to be part of L.E.A.D. because their values align with those of our school.'
- The executive management team, consisting of the chief executive officer (CEO), the director of the multi-academy trust (MAT) and the deputy chief executive officer, leads by example. The executive management team

members are highly respected by other trust and school leaders. They have ensured that throughout the expansion of the trust, it has remained true to its core and founding values.

- Trustees understand their strategic role and responsibilities well. They work to the maxim of 'eyes-on; hands-off'. The trustees' range of public and private sector experience provides a broad balance of skills which are used to inform and influence the work of the trust.
- Academy advisory boards (AAB) provide local contextual information to trustees and carry out local governance functions through support and challenge to academy leaders. The trust's scheme of delegation identifies clearly the role and responsibilities of AABs. School leaders value particularly highly the termly engagement days, when AAB members spend time in school exploring and raising their understanding of aspects of the school's work.
- Overwhelmingly, school leaders praise the trust's executive management and support teams. The expertise provided by the directors of schools, and central functions such as human resources (HR), finance, estates and governance, allows headteachers to focus on improving provision for pupils and raising standards. School leaders particularly value the prompt response they receive to queries.
- This is a trust that knows itself well. Detailed and thorough review processes at school level feed into strategic trust-level planning. Consequently, resources and expertise are focused on where they are most needed. The ability of trustees and the executive management team to reflect accurately on the work and next steps for the trust is a significant strength.
- Trustees and the executive management team have learned much from the experiences of the trust's two currently inadequate schools. In both cases, the predecessor schools were inadequate, with a legacy of underperformance. Trust leaders acknowledge that the turnaround in fortunes for these schools has taken longer than for other schools in the trust. They have identified the circumstances particular to each school and provide support specific to these needs. Where trust expertise has been less strong in the past, for example in the secondary phase, leaders have recognised this and have sought solutions, such as collaborative working with another trust.
- Systems to monitor the quality and standards in each school are rigorous and thorough. The expertise of those who provide support and challenge is evident and appreciated by school leaders. Headteachers value the directors of schools' collaborative and developmental approach to the termly quality assurance meetings. In the single school where the inspection judgement has declined while being part of the trust, trust leaders had already identified underperformance and taken steps to address this prior to the inspection.

- Headteachers are consistent in their view that the trust sees everyone as a potential leader. Talent is identified early and developed through a trust-wide career pathway programme. Headteachers say that this acts as a significant motivator for staff and contributes to workforce retention. They consider the quality and relevance of the training offered to school staff to be a strength of the trust.
- Trust leaders have put effective mechanisms in place to hear and respond to the views of pupils and staff. They use this to inform strategic thinking and to monitor and reflect on trust-wide decision-making.
- Trust leaders understand the potential impact and influence of the trust on education in the East Midlands through the training offered by the L.E.A.D. and Equate teaching school alliances. They have identified the particular strengths of each to reduce duplication and risk the dilution of content or quality.
- Pupils' attendance at schools across the trust is improving. Nevertheless, rates of persistent absence remain high, particularly at the trust's secondary academies.
- Headteachers and AAB members value the autonomy given to each school. This extends to developing curriculum content to meet the local context of their schools. However, leaders are less clear about the need for the curriculum to identify and outline the sequence of knowledge acquisition, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics.

## **Range of evidence**

Eight schools within the trust were inspected between November 2018 and May 2019. All of these inspections were carried out under either section 5 or section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (the Act), as amended.

The inspection outcomes were that:

- all four schools that received a section 8 inspection remained good
- two schools received their first academy section 5 inspections and were judged to be good
- one school received a section 5 inspection and was judged to be outstanding, having previously been judged good
- one school received a section 5 inspection and was judged to require improvement, having previously been judged outstanding.

Between 2 and 3 July, members of the summary review team visited seven schools and held telephone discussions with the headteachers of 14 other schools in the

trust. During the on-site visit to the trust, discussions were held with you, the director of the MAT, the deputy CEO and the directors of schools. HMI met with three trustees, including the chair, members from three AAB and a group of headteachers from trust schools. HMI scrutinised a range of relevant trust documentation, including strategic plans, minutes of meetings, internal quality assurance documents and safeguarding information.

## **Context**

L.E.A.D. Academy Trust has 25 schools based in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire. The trust serves almost 11,000 pupils and employs 1,500 full-time equivalent staff. The majority of the trust's schools are in Nottingham, with hubs in Sheffield, Derby, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. The trust has 22 primary and three secondary schools. Eight of the schools are sponsor-led academies, having been judged as requires improvement or inadequate before joining the trust.

The trust serves a diverse cross-section of society. Over 30% of pupils in the primary schools and almost 40% in the secondary schools are in receipt of the pupil premium. Both of these figures exceed the national averages for primary and secondary schools. Almost one third of primary pupils speak English as an additional language, much higher than the national average. The figure is much lower for secondary pupils, and is about one third of the national average.

The trust was set up in 2011 through its founding school, Huntingdon Primary in Nottingham, judged outstanding at its most recent inspection in 2011. Since then, the trust has grown in phases, with planned periods of consolidation during which trust leaders review existing practice and ensure that the trust's infrastructure, policies and practice are fit for further expansion.

The trust operates a commercial business arm, providing services to other schools and trusts beyond L.E.A.D. It has a teaching school under its own name, based in Nottingham. Through Witham St Hugh's Academy, the trust also leads the Equate teaching school alliance in Lincolnshire.

## **Main findings**

- The trust's corporate vision of providing 'the highest quality education to enable every pupil to realise their full potential' sets a constant backdrop and moral purpose to its work. It informs the strategic decision-making of its key personnel at trust and school level.
- The trustees see themselves as the custodians of the trust's vision, values and principles. They use these to frame and review their strategic discussions and decisions. They are self-critical and reflective, amending and improving their practice to maximise the impact of their role and time spent in meetings. The comprehensive range of trust performance information available allows

trustees to act in a timely manner, particularly when there may be emerging concerns about a school's performance.

- Trustees have provided valuable support to the trust as it has grown, notably through carefully planned periods of consolidation. During these times, trustees and the executive management team have reviewed their performance and invested in the infrastructure necessary to meet the next stage of the trust's growth and development. All decisions about the trust's future are framed within its vision and values, with a determination to meet, and not to compromise, the needs of existing pupils first.
- The executive management team and trustees are clear that, while the trust offers continuity, consistency and clarity of vision and values, its schools should also have the autonomy to develop to meet the needs of the communities they serve. Described as 'aligned autonomy', the trust aims to 'provide support without stifling enterprise'. This approach is highly valued by school leaders and AABs.
- The trust has acted to put interim AABs in place where the actions of existing local governance have not delivered substantial and sustained improvements in a timely way. Currently, the role of AABs is being renewed, with slight changes to the scheme of delegation planned to provide greater clarity and emphasis on the quality and impact of challenge that local governors can bring to school leaders. This reflects the impact of the regular review and refinement process of the wider trust governance.
- The trust's priorities are well founded and clearly linked to the trust's strategic intent. Plans for improvement indicate that quality assurance and self-review systems are well embedded and provide an accurate insight into the work of the trust. Leaders ensure that actions are carried out in accordance with the plans. As one AAB member put it, 'What they say will happen, happens.'
- A strength of the trust's leadership is its recognition of where performance is strong and where it can be improved. This extends to an acknowledgement that the trust's experience and expertise in supporting secondary schools is developing. To this end, the trustees and executive management team have shown commitment to their principles, and a certain humility, in putting children first and working collaboratively with another trust to improve secondary school performance. This action was well received by the secondary school leaders and is having an impact on standards of teaching and learning. There are reliable processes in place to report on the impact of this work in the different schools. The trust is careful to ensure that these arrangements strengthen the capacity of the schools' leaders to build on these improvements.
- Members of the AABs appreciate the range and quality of governor training provided by the trust. They understand the breadth and importance of their role in communicating local information to the trust and disseminating and

adapting trust policy to their local context. They believe that being part of the trust has made a significant difference to their schools. As one member said, 'There is no mistaking what the trust's end objectives are.' In particular, they praise the use of school leaders from the trust's most established and successful primary schools to support those that still have a distance to travel on their improvement journey.

- The trust's principles are evident and well publicised in each of its schools. Its vision and values are well understood by school leaders, including in those schools that have most recently joined the trust. Headteachers are overwhelmingly positive about trust membership, describing improvement in all aspects of their schools since joining the trust. School leaders and teachers willingly share expertise through formal networks, school-to-school support and informal contact. Headteachers believe that this helps to eliminate any sense of isolation and promotes collaborative practice.
- Headteachers are pleased to release their staff to support colleagues in other schools. They see this as a positive means of developing the leadership skills of these staff members within and beyond their own schools. Many comment on the trust's capacity to identify and harness leadership talent early, and view this as a strength, saying that it motivates current and potential leaders to invest their professional futures in the trust.
- School leaders value highly the trust's commitment to providing enrichment activities to enable all pupils to develop socially and academically. This widens pupils' experiences, including their exposure to diversity, and supports schools in the delivery of their curriculums for personal, social and health education (PSHE), and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC).
- The trust holds school leaders to account for ensuring that the curriculum offered to pupils is not narrowed to core subjects, such as English and mathematics. School leaders value the autonomy given to develop curriculums that reflect the contexts of their schools, notwithstanding that these must be aligned with the values of the trust. The development of each school's curriculum is one of the trust's key actions for the next two years. However, this work has not yet focused on the building of pupils' knowledge in a well-thought-through sequential manner, particularly in foundation subjects.
- Headteachers are confident that the trust will support them at short notice through the provision of bespoke financial or professional expertise. They cited many examples of how the trust had listened to their needs and reacted quickly, positively and with impact on matters of employment, finance, buildings, and teaching and learning.
- The systems for assessing and monitoring the performance of each school are comprehensive and enable trust leaders to have an accurate view of strengths, weaknesses and trends across the trust. The rating of each school's

progress towards raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils (those in receipt of the pupil premium) provides a good example of using a range of indicators. In addition to attainment information, pupils' well-being, school attendance and participation in extra-curricular activities are considered when arriving at a balanced view of each school's impact on disadvantaged pupils. This information then allows trust leaders to pinpoint resources and provide bespoke support where it is most needed.

- Published outcomes for the trust's schools show that in the early years, in the national Year 1 phonics check, and in key stages 1 and 2 reading, writing and mathematics, outcomes are improving for all pupils. The gaps between the trust schools' aggregated figures and national figures are closing in on, and in some cases overtaking, the national averages.
- In the trust's three secondary schools, attainment and progress remain below those seen nationally. However, the percentage of pupils achieving a standard pass in GCSE English and mathematics is increasing, reflecting the impact of the work of the trust and its partner trust in addressing standards in the trust's secondary schools.
- Trends in permanent and fixed-term exclusions show a decline over the past two years, reflecting the trust's commitment to inclusion and to keeping pupils in school for their academic and social development. While attendance overall is improving in both the primary and secondary phases, persistent absence is still high, particularly in the secondary schools.
- Over time, the L.E.A.D. teaching school alliance has built a reputation that has resulted in the delivery of nationally accredited qualifications and training in the East Midlands. The range of courses has been further increased and strengthened by the addition of the Lincolnshire-based Equate teaching school alliance. In keeping with the trust's values and commitment to improving the sector, it has also developed a no-cost network for MAT finance directors, which has expanded from a local, to a regional, to a national, network.
- Leaders regularly assess the impact of the teaching schools' offers. They have received positive feedback on their courses on developing high-quality teaching and learning, with participating schools often commenting on how these have improved practice far beyond the trust. Trust leaders believe that this success reflects the effectiveness of the trust's work to improve standards in its own schools.

## **Safeguarding**

- The policy and procedures for safeguarding are well documented at trust level and adapted by schools to meet their contextual needs. Safeguarding is an integral part of the termly quality review cycle for every academy. Audit and sampling practices check that the trust's policies are implemented consistently throughout the trust.
- Designated safeguarding leads for each school meet regularly to keep their knowledge up to date and to share strong practice. School leaders are very positive about the availability of advice and support from the director of schools with responsibility for safeguarding. The range and content of staff training opportunities are informed by trust leaders' analysis and review of any incidents and potential risks faced by pupils in their local contexts.
- Headteachers know that there is no room for complacency when it comes to safeguarding. Trust leaders produce monthly safeguarding updates that are posted on the trust's website. These include learning from beyond the trust. For example, serious case reviews are used to good effect to strengthen knowledge and practice further. Links with local authority safeguarding officers are positive.

## **Recommendations**

- Continue the work of improving attendance across the trust. The rates of persistent absenteeism require further reduction, particularly at the secondary schools.
- Build on the work already started on developing each academy's curriculum offer, ensuring that the knowledge to be learned and the sequence of how and when that knowledge is taught are explicit and understood by leaders, staff and pupils.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McMullan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## Annex: Academies that are part of the trust

### Schools inspected as part of the batched inspections – section 8 inspections

School	Date opened as part of trust and predecessor school inspection judgement on conversion	Most recent inspection judgement and date as part of trust
Sycamore Academy	September 2013 Predecessor school – good	Good (S8 short) 27 November 2018 (previously good – December 2014)
Hogarth Academy	November 2013 Predecessor school – requires improvement	Good (S8 short) 30 January 2019 (previously good – June 2015)
Windmill L.E.A.D Academy	February 2013 Predecessor school – inadequate	Good (S8 short) 26 February 2019 (previously good – February 2015)
Millfield L.E.A.D Academy	January 2013 Predecessor school – inadequate	Good (S8 short) 6 March 2019 (previously good – November 2014)

### Schools inspected as part of the batched inspections – section 5 inspections

School	Date opened as part of trust and predecessor school inspection judgement on conversion	Most recent inspection judgement and date as part of trust
Warren Primary Academy	September 2013 Predecessor school - good	Requires improvement 27 February 2019 (previously outstanding – January 2013)
Uplands Junior L.E.A.D Academy	June 2016 Predecessor school – inadequate	Good 13 March 2019 (first academy inspection)
Edna G. Olds Academy	September 2013 Predecessor school – satisfactory	Outstanding 21 March 2019 (previously good – November 2013)
Manor Farm Academy	January 2018	Good 8 May 2019

	New school first opened in September 2016	(first academy inspection)
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## Other schools

### Primary

School	Date opened as part of trust and predecessor school inspection judgement on conversion	Most recent inspection judgement and date as part of trust
St Ann's Well Academy	September 2013 Predecessor school – good	Good (S8 short) 31 January 2018 (previously good – June 2014)
Bishop Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy	February 2014 Predecessor school – requires improvement	Good 18 January 2017 (first academy inspection)
Jubilee L.E.A.D. Academy	December 2014 Predecessor school - inadequate (special measures)	Inadequate (serious weaknesses) 12 October 2017 (first academy inspection)
Radford Primary School Academy	December 2014 Predecessor school – requires improvement	Good 18 October 2017 (first academy inspection)
The Glapton Academy	July 2014 Predecessor school – good	Good (S8 short) 27 September 2016 (first academy inspection)
Huntingdon Academy	September 2013 Predecessor school – outstanding	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Birley Primary Academy	February 2017 Predecessor school – good	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Birley Spa Primary Academy	February 2017 Predecessor school – good	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Charnock Hall Primary Academy	February 2017 Predecessor school – requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Rainbow Forge Primary Academy	February 2017 Predecessor school – requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Cloudside Academy	September 2017 Predecessor school – inadequate	Not yet inspected as part of trust

Witham St Hughs Academy	January 2018 Outstanding since 2012	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Waddington All Saints Academy	January 2018 Predecessor school – outstanding	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Forest Lodge Academy	January 2018 Predecessor school - good	Not yet inspected as part of trust

## Secondary

<b>School</b>	<b>Date opened as part of trust and predecessor school inspection judgement on conversion</b>	<b>Most recent inspection judgement and date as part of trust</b>
Noel-Baker Academy	February 2017 Predecessor school – inadequate (special measures)	Inadequate (special measures) 11 July 2018 (first academy inspection)
The Birley Academy	February 2017 Predecessor school – requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of trust
Da Vinci Academy	May 2017 Predecessor school – requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of trust