

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
**Textphone** 0161 618 8524  
[MAT@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:MAT@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



21 November 2019

David Donnelly  
Chief Executive Officer  
c/o Palace Fields Primary School  
Badger Close  
Runcorn  
WA7 2QW

Dear Mr Donnelly

### **Summary evaluation of Heath Family (North West) Trust**

Following the summary evaluation of the trust in November 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 my visit to the trust, with Paul Tomkow, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 18 to 20 November. 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**

- The trust does not have a proven track record of improving the quality of education across its schools.
- For every school that has improved its Ofsted rating since joining the trust, another has declined.
- Pupils do not achieve well, particularly in the secondary phase. Disadvantaged pupils, boys and the most able pupils make especially poor progress.
- The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not consistently identified, assessed and met well across the trust.

- Pupils' attendance remains a concern. The rates of absence and persistent absence in secondary schools have been much higher than national averages in recent years.
- Leaders have not managed the trust's finances effectively in the past. As a result, financial hardship has compounded the difficulties now facing the trust.
- Leaders are not using the considerable extra funds that they receive to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils well.
- The trust is dependent upon external support to improve its schools.
- There is a lack of curriculum expertise across the trust. As a result, pupils do not typically benefit from ambitious and well-planned curriculums.
- Since joining the trust in September 2017, the chief executive officer (CEO) has stabilised the trust. Under his leadership, the trust's financial position is more secure.
- The CEO has overseen improvements to governance. All trustees have recently joined the trust board and all local governing bodies (LGBs) have been reconstituted. These changes reflect what many school leaders identify as a positive 'sea-change' in the trust's approach.
- The CEO has started to work more closely with school leaders and members of LGBs. The early signs indicate that this is beginning to improve the quality of leadership across the trust.
- Emerging evidence indicates that some of the school's most vulnerable schools are beginning to improve.
- The trust has been more successful at improving its primary schools than it has its secondaries.
- The new trust board have defined a new vision for the trust. This vision is not yet well understood by different stakeholders.

### **Range of evidence**

- A range of evidence was gathered in relation to the impact of the trust on the quality of education across its schools.
- A range of relevant documentation was scrutinised.
- The outcomes of the four most recent inspections were considered. Two of these inspections were monitoring inspection visits. Inspectors also took account of the outcomes of other inspections of schools in the trust.

- Inspectors visited four schools on 19 November 2019 and met with principals, executive principals, members of LGBs and middle leaders.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with the principals of five other schools on 20 November 2019.

The four most recent inspections were carried out between March and October 2019. Two of the inspections were carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The other two were carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, as amended.

The inspection outcomes were:

- One school declined from requires improvement to inadequate and is now subject to special measures. In a subsequent monitoring visit, inspectors judged that leaders and managers were taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.
- One school was judged to be requires improvement in its first inspection.
- In a monitoring inspection of a school that requires improvement, inspectors judged that leaders and managers were not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

## **Context**

The Heath Family (North West) trust currently runs nine schools spread across four local authorities in the North West. The trust consists of five primary schools and four secondary schools. Six of the schools are academy converters and three are sponsor-led academies.

The trust was established in June 2011 with The Heath School in Halton joining the trust. The Heath School was one of the first designated national teaching schools. The trust has expanded with one school joining in 2013, one in 2014, one in 2015, three in 2016 and one in 2017. The most recent school to join the trust was Litherland Moss Primary School in September 2018.

No schools have been re-brokered in or out of the trust.

The primary schools vary in size from around 120 pupils in Bridgewater Park Primary School to 380 in Halsnead Primary School. The secondary schools range from 570 pupils in Litherland High School to 1120 in The Heath School.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the trust is above that found nationally. The proportions of pupils with SEND varies significantly across schools but is broadly average overall. The proportions of pupils who speak English as an additional language or who are from minority ethnic groups are lower than national averages.

## **Main findings**

### **The performance of the trust's schools**

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

- Three schools were judged to be good at their last inspection: Bridgewater Park improved from inadequate. Palace Fields Primary Academy improved from requires improvement. The Heath School declined from outstanding.
- Three schools were judged to be requires improvement at their last inspection: Litherland High School improved from inadequate. Sir William Stanier Community School remained as requires improvement. Halsnead Primary School declined from good.
- One school was judged to be inadequate: The Prescott School declined from requires improvement and is now subject to special measures.
- Two schools are yet to be inspected since joining the trust. One of these, Daresbury Primary School, is outstanding. Litherland Moss Primary School is good.

Pupils' attainment is weak across the trust. Over the last two years, only one half of pupils left primary school having reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. This left many pupils poorly prepared for secondary school. Provisional information indicates that in three of the trust's secondary schools, less than one half of Year 11 pupils attained a standard pass in both English and mathematics in 2019. This is well below the national average and limits the range of opportunities that are available to pupils once they leave secondary school. In two of the trust's secondary schools the proportion of pupils who do not advance to further education, employment or training has been considerably lower than the national average in recent years.

Pupils make better progress in key stage 2 than they do in the trust's secondary schools. For the last two years, pupils have made broadly average progress in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2. However, the amount of progress made by pupils in different primary schools varies considerably. The progress made by pupils in three of four secondary schools was significantly below the national average in 2018. Provisional information for 2019 indicates that progress in the same three secondary schools remained significantly below the national average and that progress had declined further in two of these schools.

Across the trust, the quality of education provided by schools has led to weak achievement for many pupils, and especially for the following groups: boys, disadvantaged pupils, the most able and those with SEND.

### **Leadership and management of the trust**

The trust grew quickly during the middle years of the decade. Between 2014 and 2017, six new schools joined the trust. Four of these schools joined the trust following inspections that raised concerns about their overall effectiveness. Leaders were able to bring about notable improvements in most of these schools. In subsequent inspections, three of these four schools improved their overall effectiveness.

Despite these notable achievements, leaders did not manage the expansion of the trust effectively. Leaders did not build the systems and structures that would enable them to bring about significant and sustainable improvement across the trust. As a result, variation in the performance of different schools became more pronounced. For every school that improved, another declined. It soon became apparent that, where improvements had been made in some schools, they were fragile. Subsequently, pupils' outcomes in some schools declined.

The challenges facing the trust were compounded by poor financial management. This was epitomised by the high salary that was paid to the previous CEO. The trust's financial difficulties led to it being issued with a financial notice to improve in 2018. At the same time, the trust received a significant advance on funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

You became CEO in September 2017 in the midst of the trust's difficulties. During your tenure you have set about stabilising the trust by putting its finances back on a firm footing. Capably supported by a small central team, you have managed the trust's finances prudently. Your team has helped school leaders to manage their budgets well. This has ensured that, on the whole, pupils have not directly felt the effects of the trust's financial difficulties. School leaders appreciate this support. They also value the help they receive to manage their premises and with HR.

You have a clear understanding of the trust's overall strengths and weaknesses. Working with your trustees, you have established an overall plan which aims to remedy the most glaring weaknesses in the trust before seeking to bring about more ambitious change.

You have made promising improvements to leadership across the trust. All members of the current trust board have joined the trust since your appointment. They have worked with you to clarify the roles and responsibilities of LGBs. All LGBs have been reconstituted since you joined the trust. You ensure a rigorous process is in place for the appointment of trustees and members of LGBs. The evidence indicates that LGBs are becoming more effective in the way that they support and challenge school leaders. You are also supporting principals more directly. School leaders appreciate this additional support and they feel it is improving their leadership. Many school staff feel that there has recently been a positive sea-change in the work of the trust.

Emerging evidence indicates that improved leadership is beginning to have impact. For example, there is clear evidence to show that two of the trust's most vulnerable schools have been well supported and are beginning to improve. There are also signs that schools are beginning to work together more productively. The appointment of an executive headteacher has significantly increased the amount of joint working between The Heath School and The Prescott School. You also feel that several projects between some of the primary schools are beginning to improve aspects of teaching. For example, Litherland Moss Primary School and Daresbury Primary School have been working together on a 'talk for writing' project. This work appears to have contributed to significant improvements in pupils' writing.

Despite these encouraging signs, you are under no illusions about the scale of the challenge facing the trust. The trust has not done enough in recent years to improve its schools. Not enough has been done to identify and develop talented individuals across the trust. Trust leaders have not ensured that staff benefit from a well-planned programme of opportunities for training and career development. The trust has not harnessed the expertise that exists within its schools, including a significant number of specialist leaders of education. There have also been limited opportunities for staff from different schools to work together. As a result, the trust has become dependent on external support from local authorities and other multi-academy trusts. It has also contributed to the intermittent support for schools that has left some staff feeling isolated.

The trust has not done enough to develop expertise in key areas. For example, there is a lack of curriculum expertise across the trust. This has led to curriculum narrowing in some schools. The proportion of pupils entered for the English Baccalaureate varies greatly between schools. Across the primary phase, not enough has been done to develop the curriculum in subjects beyond English and mathematics. You acknowledge that you have not done enough to develop the curriculum across your schools. You have recently started to look at this important area across the trust. However, this work is in its very early stages.

There is a lack of expertise in how to identify and support pupils with SEND across the trust. This is reflected in the poor attendance and outcomes for these pupils. Some schools have been without a special educational needs coordinator for a significant period of time and others are very new to post.

The large number of disadvantaged pupils are not well supported across the trust. The trust receives approximately £1.5 million in additional pupil premium funding each year to improve the achievement of these pupils. This funding is not used well. School leaders do not receive the support that they need to develop an ambitious and effective strategy for helping these pupils to learn well. As a result, these pupils continue to attend less regularly and achieve less well than others in the trust and nationally.

Pupils' attendance continues to be a concern despite signs of improvement. Three of the four secondary schools have had rates of persistent absence that are considerably higher than national averages in recent years. In one secondary school, the overall rate of absence has been more than double the national average and approximately one-third of pupils have been classed as persistently absent. You have therefore focused on helping schools to improve pupils' attendance. As a result, there is clear evidence that attendance across the primary phase is improving. There are also early signs that attendance is beginning to improve in several secondary schools, as leaders become more methodical in the strategies that they employ to encourage regular attendance and challenge unnecessary absence. The frequency with which fixed-term exclusion is being used as a sanction in secondary schools is also decreasing.

Staff have a very limited understanding of the trust's vision and its values. This has contributed to a perception among staff that the trust lacks identity. You have begun to address this with the trust board. A new vision for the trust was written in January 2019. It outlines your commitment to every pupil. It also articulates the trust's responsibility for developing pupils holistically. This vision has not been shared widely across the trust.

## **Safeguarding**

Pupils are looked after well by schools in the trust. This reflects the caring ethos that exists across schools and the high priority that leaders at all levels give to

safeguarding. All published Ofsted reports confirm that arrangements for safeguarding are effective in each of the trust's schools that have been inspected.

The trust's central team have thorough systems in place to check that the work of schools is compliant with safeguarding requirements. They also check that school staff have a clear understanding of the safeguarding risks that are potentially more prevalent within the school's context. LGBs hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of their work to keep pupils safe. They have systems in place to evaluate the extent to which schools have established a positive safeguarding culture.

Leaders are aware of the safeguarding risks that are heightened because of poor attendance. They have ensured that all schools have robust systems in place for ascertaining the whereabouts of pupils who are absent from school. The trust works closely with local authorities to keep pupils safe.

## **Recommendations**

- Urgently share the recently established trust vision and values to create a stronger identity for the trust and to guide future work to improve schools.
- Establish a coherent framework for developing staff and make better use of the expertise that exists within the trust, to build capacity and reduce reliance on external support.
- Build leaders' understanding of curriculum so they can ensure that all pupils, irrespective of background, benefit from broad, ambitious and well-planned curriculums.
- Ensure that the quality of education provided by schools leads to better outcomes for pupils, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, boys and the most able.
- Improve leadership of SEND so that schools are able to identify, assess and meet the needs of pupils with SEND more effectively.
- Take further steps to reduce rates of absence and persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- Ensure that leaders enact effective strategies for improving the learning of disadvantaged pupils, which include judicious spending of the pupil premium.

Yours sincerely

Will Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## Annex: Academies that are part of the Trust

### Trust schools inspected between March and October 2019 as part of stage 1: section 5 inspections

School	Local authority	Context/previous inspection judgement	Most recent Section 5 inspection	Inspection grade
The Prescot School	Knowsley	Predecessor school: requires improvement. Joined trust in August 2016.	March 2019	Inadequate
Halshead Primary School	Knowsley	Predecessor school: good. Joined trust in June 2017.	October 2019	Requires improvement

### Trust schools inspected between March and October 2019 as part of stage 1: section 8 inspections

School	Local authority	Context/previous inspection judgement	Most recent Section 8 inspection	Inspection judgement
Sir William Stanier Community School	Cheshire East	Joined trust in September 2013. Predecessor school: requires improvement. Judged to be requires improvement in 2016 and 2018.	October 2019	Taking ineffective action towards becoming a good school
The Prescot School	Knowsley	Placed in special measures in March 2019	September	Taking effective action towards the removal of special measures

### Other trust schools that have been inspected since joining the trust

School	Local authority	Context/previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection	Inspection judgement
Bridgewater Park Primary School	Halton	Predecessor school: Inadequate. Joined trust in April 2014.	Section 5 November 2016	Good
Palace Fields Primary Academy	Halton	Predecessor school: Requires improvement. Joined trust in September 2016.	Section 5 April 2019	Good
The Heath School	Halton	Predecessor school: Outstanding. Joined trust in June 2011.	Section 5 September 2017	Good
Litherland High School	Sefton	Predecessor school: Inadequate.	Section 5 March 2018	Requires Improvement

### Schools that have not yet been inspected since joining the trust

School	Local Authority	Context/Most recent inspection grade
Daresbury Primary School	Halton	Joined trust in November 2016. Predecessor school judged outstanding in September 2008.
Litherland Moss Primary School	Sefton	Joined trust in September 2018. Predecessor school judged good in February 2017.