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Sarah Smith - Chair of the Board of Trustees
Christopher Mansell - Chief Executive Officer
Birmingham Diocesan Multi Academy Trust
1 Colmore Row
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Dear Mrs Smith and Dr Mansell

Summary evaluation of Birmingham Diocesan Multi Academy Trust

Following the summary evaluation of Birmingham Diocesan Multi Academy Trust (or 'the trust') in March 2022, when I was accompanied by Ann Pritchard and Ian Tustian, Her Majesty's Inspectors, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the trust on 7 to 10 March 2022. 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 evidence gathering activities

For stage 1 of this summary evaluation, six schools were inspected between September and November 2021. All these inspections were carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (the Act), as amended.

The inspection outcomes were:

- Two schools improved from requires improvement to good
- One school retained the same judgement of requires improvement
- One had its first section 5 inspection as a converter academy
- Two schools declined. Of these, one moved from good to requires improvement and one moved from good to inadequate.

Over the course of the on-site visit to the trust, discussions were held with you, the director of school improvement and the director of finance and operations. We met with six representatives of the board of directors, including the chair of the board. Discussions were also held with the head of school support and two members of the school improvement team. We visited six trust schools that had not been inspected during stage 1 of the summary evaluation process. In each of these schools, we met with the headteacher, senior and curriculum leaders and members of the local academy board (LAB). The lead inspector spoke to one local academy board remotely online. Inspectors also conducted telephone surveys with headteachers from six other schools in the trust.

Context

Birmingham Diocesan Multi Academy Trust (BDMAT) is a trust which serves 19 schools – 18 primary and one secondary. The schools are located in Birmingham, Solihull and Warwickshire local authorities. Three schools have joined the trust in the last 18 months. Of these, one is a converter academy, one is a voluntary merger and the other is a new free academy that has recently opened. The trust was established in April 2017.

The trust's schools vary in size from just below 95 pupils in Newton Regis CofE Primary School to around 450 pupils in St Michael's CofE Primary School, Bartley Green.

The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who are disadvantaged, is higher than the national average, though this varies from academy to academy within the trust.

Eighteen of the 19 schools in the trust are Church of England schools and part of the Birmingham Diocese.

The trust board is made up of 13 directors. This group is responsible for the strategic oversight and performance of the trust and its schools.

Main findings

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

- Eight schools are judged to be good
- Four schools are judged to be requires improvement
- One academy is judged to be inadequate
- Six schools have yet to be inspected since joining the trust. Three of these were judged as good and two were judged as requiring improvement in their predecessor schools. The new free secondary academy has yet to be inspected.

Impact of the trust on its academies – governance and delegation

- The trust's vision is shared widely and understood very well by those who work there. It underpins the Christian values which are intrinsic within the trust. It is at the heart of BDMAT's work and is referred to regularly. This ensures that schools know and adhere to the trust's mission.
- Directors and staff at all levels are ambitious for pupils and have high expectations. The strategic plan is sharply focused on the key priority areas. Each aim is monitored and evaluated carefully against precise key performance indicators.
- The trust has adopted a 'co-creation' approach to working with academy leaders. This involves schools having autonomy in many areas, but the trust maintaining responsibility and ownership in other critical areas. Central policies are produced for most statutory and legislative aspects, but schools generate their own policies for other aspects to meet their local context. The scheme of delegation makes clear the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, from independent members through to headteachers.
- Directors are persistent and challenging when holding the executive team to account. At board meetings, they insist that officers provide 'impact' answers to their questions, rather than narrative. This allows them to evaluate the quality of school support accurately and determine the effectiveness of their central staff.
- Trust leaders are able to detect areas of strength and weakness within their schools through regular and rigorous school progress meetings. Officers use information judiciously to determine the level of support needed for categorisation of schools. 'Priority' schools receive regular and intense scrutiny. Conversely, successful schools are used as 'capacity givers' to share good practice.

Impact of the trust on its academies – leadership and management

- Leaders have placed the 'whole child' at the centre of the trust ethos – academically, socially, spiritually and culturally. Leaders give high regard to the promotion of equality and diversity throughout the entire trust. This is a fundamental element of the trust's identity.
- The trust provides effective support to schools that are underperforming. The school improvement team monitors each academy closely to identify the level of support needed to bring about improvement. Academy leaders value the timeliness and quality of this provision. However, as the trust has grown, it has placed increasing demands and pressure on the school improvement team. While some support has been outsourced, the trust intends to build capacity in house to secure sustainable school improvement.
- Directors have reviewed their approach to recruitment recently to ensure that

they are able to attract high calibre staff. Leaders readily utilise the expertise that exists within the trust to retain staff. They have established staff networks, including middle leaders, LAB chairs and headteachers, to develop staff at all levels successfully.

- LAB members understand their delegated responsibilities well. They work collaboratively and cohesively with executive leaders and directors to both support and challenge academy leaders. Lines and methods of communication between these stakeholders are well defined and well established. As a result, governance arrangements are effective.
- Leaders at all levels are held, and hold each other, to account effectively. There are clear structures in place that enable stakeholders to scrutinise plans and ask searching questions. Leaders at all levels are provided with the right information at the right time. As a result, they can identify tangible actions that support the wider development of the individual schools.

Impact of the trust on its academies – curriculum and quality of education

- Schools have the autonomy to plan their own curriculums based on their local context. However, this is within the parameters of non-negotiables set by the trust. For example, all schools must reflect diversity and equality within their curriculums.
- The trust has supported schools to develop subject-based curriculums so that pupils are clear about what they are learning. Trust leaders have identified the need to further support schools to ensure that their curriculums incorporate pupils' development of knowledge and skills – right from the early years through to pupils leaving school. The trust's 'bridging units' are helping schools to ensure that transition points are seamless and that there is a smooth curriculums continuum as pupils move from one key stage to another.
- School leaders are able to share expertise and appraise their curriculums through curriculum network meetings and peer-to-peer reviews. However, there remains work to do to ensure that all leaders and teachers have secure subject knowledge in all subjects to enable them to deliver the intended curriculum effectively. Where common development areas are identified, the trust has produced 'toolkits' to support leaders and staff to develop the quality of teaching and learning.
- Trust leaders' school improvement visits and progress meetings identify pupils who are underachieving, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Bespoke support is matched to needs identified and is effective.
- The trust has identified that school assessment processes need further refinement so that leaders and staff know how well pupils are achieving and can identify any gaps in learning in all areas of the curriculum. Work to improve this is at an early stage of development in the foundation subjects.

Impact of the trust on its academies – Behaviour and Attitudes

- Executive leaders give each academy 'licensed autonomy' to develop their own policy and approach to behaviour. This allows each academy to reflect the detailed understanding it has of its pupils, but also reflect the trust's values. LABs have responsibility for behaviour, with oversight by directors and the central team. This delegated responsibility is understood clearly. During stage 1 of this summary evaluation, five out of six schools inspected received good judgements for behaviour and attitudes, showing it to be a strength.
- There is a consistent approach to behaviour management. Leaders at all levels reflect a common high expectation of behaviour for all pupils in the trust. When schools prepare to join BDMAT, behaviour and attendance needs are identified as part of due diligence checks. This is so the trust can pinpoint what level of support schools need from the outset.
- Trust leaders monitor behaviour through regular visits, formal reviews and the analysis of school-level information. Where issues are identified, they intervene. The trust has utilised external support and expertise to improve behaviour management where required. Executive leaders check the effectiveness of this external work.
- A small number of pupils are on part-time timetables. Leaders check that this is an appropriate approach for these pupils and that they are used rarely. Part-time timetables are not seen as a long-term solution for pupils.
- The trust's central team scrutinise records meticulously for suspensions and exclusions. They ensure that trust procedures are followed correctly. Where suspensions are used, reintegration of pupils follows a restorative approach based on the trust's values. Schools do not use internal exclusions and managed moves are rare.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is at the heart of the trust's work. Its oversight of safeguarding is highly effective due to the expertise of the trust's safeguarding leader. Annual safeguarding audits across schools are robust and comprehensive. Headteachers value the support and guidance they receive to improve their safeguarding procedures further.

Safeguarding procedures in all BDMAT schools are consistent and keep pupils as safe as possible. All schools follow the trust's policy but tailor their actions, where needed, to meet the risk factors in their local communities. Inspectors confirmed that safeguarding requirements were effective in all six inspections conducted during phase 1 of this summary evaluation.

Close working relationships exist with the local authorities where schools are situated. Additional support is accessed quickly to help pupils at risk of harm. School leaders report that the trust's support for safeguarding throughout the pandemic was

exceptional.

Robust safeguarding training for staff is provided and signposted by the trust. Clear expectations of what safeguarding training must be covered are set out together with additional training to meet identified local needs. The trust's safeguarding leader ensures that all training is completed and relevant.

The trust has a detailed oversight of recruitment. It has set out clear recruitment guidelines and ensures that schools adhere to them when appointing staff. This includes ensuring that the required checks are completed prior to staff being employed.

Recommendations

- Implement the trust's plans to develop sustainable school improvement capacity, respond to the ongoing growth of the trust and continue to meet BDMAT's evolving needs.
- Continue to develop the subject knowledge and skills of leaders and teachers in all areas of the curriculum, including in the early years, so that they can plan and deliver effective learning for all pupils that builds on prior knowledge and understanding.
- Build on the support provided for school leaders to develop their assessment processes so that gaps in pupils' learning can be identified and addressed.

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of the trust

School Information				Most recent inspection		
URN	School name	Local Authority	Date joined trust	Does the inspection relate to the school in its current form?	Inspection date	OE grade
138433	St Michael's CofE Primary Academy, Handsworth	Birmingham	01/09/2017	Yes	22/09/2021	Requires improvement
139127	The Nethersole CofE Academy	Warwickshire	01/09/2017	Yes	30/11/2021	Inadequate
139269	Hawkesley Church Primary Academy	Birmingham	01/09/2017	Yes	13/10/2021	Good
146107	St Margaret's CofE Primary School	Solihull	01/09/2018	Yes	24/11/2021	Good
140153	Woodside CofE Primary School	Warwickshire	01/09/2019	Yes	17/11/2021	Requires improvement
142358	Nonsuch Primary School	Birmingham	01/01/2019	Yes	06/10/2021	Good
138432	St Clement's CofE Academy	Birmingham	01/09/2017	Yes	18/12/2018	Good
139126	St George's CofE Academy, Newtown	Birmingham	01/09/2017	Yes	13/03/2019	Good
139267	St George's CofE Primary School Edgbaston	Birmingham	01/09/2017	Yes	28/02/2019	Good

146171	Coleshill CofE Primary School	Warwickshire	01/09/2018	Yes	16/02/2022	Good
140463	Holy Trinity CofE Primary Academy (Handsworth)	Birmingham	01/01/2019	Yes	24/01/2019	Requires improvement
139174	St Michael's CofE Primary School	Birmingham	01/01/2019	Yes	11/03/2020	Requires improvement
143439	Quinton Church Primary School	Birmingham	01/01/2019	Yes	16/10/2019	Good
140125	Austrey CofE Primary School	Warwickshire	01/09/2019	No	28/02/2018	Good
140139	Newton Regis CofE Primary School	Warwickshire	01/09/2019	No	03/07/2019	Good
140152	Warton Nethersole's CofE Primary School	Warwickshire	01/09/2019	No	03/04/2019	Good
148084	Lady Katherine Leveson CofE Primary School	Solihull	01/09/2020	No	16/10/2019	Requires improvement
140462	Bentley Heath Church of England Primary School	Solihull	01/07/2021	No	25/09/2019	Requires improvement
148589	Christ Church Secondary School	Birmingham	01/09/2021	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

*Schools highlighted received a section 5 inspection in part 1 of the MAT SE