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Trevor Sutcliffe, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Bernadette Hunter, Chief Executive Officer
Central Co-operative Learning Trust
Outwoods Primary School
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Burton-on-Trent
Staffordshire
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Dear Mr Sutcliffe and Mrs Hunter

Summary evaluation of Central Co-operative Learning Trust

Following the summary evaluation of Central Co-operative Learning Trust (or 'the trust') in October 2022, when I was accompanied by Mark Howes, His Majesty's Inspector, I am writing on behalf of His 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 3 to 6 October 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, four schools were inspected between February and July 2022. All these inspections were carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (the Act), as amended.

The inspection outcomes were:

- three schools retained the same overall judgement of good; and
- one school retained the overall judgement of good. However, there was evidence that suggested the inspection grade might not be as high if a full

inspection was carried out, and therefore a graded inspection was recommended for its next inspection.

Over the course of the on-site visit to the trust, discussions were held with you and other senior and operational staff. We met with you, the director of school improvement and representatives of the board of trustees, including the chair of the board. We visited the four 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 leaders and members of the local governing board. Inspectors also met with two headteachers from schools who had been inspected during stage 1 of the summary evaluation process.

Context

Central Co-operative Learning Trust is a trust which serves eight primary schools. The schools are located in Staffordshire and Walsall local authorities. Two schools joined the trust in the first two months of 2022. These are both converter academies. The trust was established in September 2017.

The trust's schools vary in size from just below 170 pupils in Grange School to around 700 pupils in Blackwood School.

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

The trust board is made up of nine trustees. 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:

- four schools are judged to be good; and
- four schools have yet to be inspected since joining the trust. Three of these were judged to be good and one of these was judged to be inadequate in their predecessor schools.

Impact of the trust on its academies – governance and delegation

- Trust leaders have successfully fostered a cooperative community that works effectively across the schools. Everyone, from trustees to school staff, understands and believes in the trust's vision. Pupils' best interests lie at the heart of this vision. Leaders see every pupil as being a member of the trust, regardless of the school that they attend. As the trust has grown, the alignment of school and trust values is the central thread that binds the trust together.
- Each school within the trust has maintained its own unique identity that reflects the pupils and the local community it serves. Trust leaders celebrate this uniqueness and the richness that it brings to the trust family. Schools and local governing boards have autonomy over many areas of school life. However, trustees have careful oversight of these areas, and maintain their full responsibility in other critical aspects, such as safeguarding. Where appropriate, schools produce local policies that reflect both the core values of the trust and the local context of the school. School and trust responsibilities are clearly laid out in the scheme of delegation. They are understood by all.
- Trust leaders take time and care to get to know each school as it joins the trust. They continue to review school leaders' progress in addressing areas of weakness in their school in a variety of ways. This includes encouraging school leaders to reflect on the effectiveness of their actions. Trustees work closely with trust leaders to provide scrutiny and supportive accountability. This means that trustees and trust leaders have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of each school.

Impact of the trust on its academies – leadership and management

- Trustees and trust leaders have a clear vision for the further growth of the trust. Their plans are considered and sustainable. They are alert to the challenge that their growth plan presents in ensuring that there is sufficient capacity in the trust leadership team to support and improve the schools. Trustees continue to reshape and build this capacity as the trust grows.
- Trust leaders value all staff. They recognise the importance of developing the trust's wider leadership. They have created opportunities for this, for instance, through the appointment of six new 'trust improvement leads'. This is supported by a host of cooperative networks across schools where staff can share ideas and good practice. Many of these networks, such as the special educational needs coordinators and early years leaders, are well-established and are working effectively.
- Trust leaders help schools improve in a variety of ways. This support includes peer reviews, coaching for leaders and commissioning input from external

experts. The support is thorough and well considered. However, in foundation subjects, trust leaders' quality assurance processes focus primarily on how teachers are teaching rather than on what pupils are learning.

- Governance arrangements are clearly defined and understood by all. Trust leaders have worked alongside local governing board members to ensure that they provide effective support and challenge in each school. As part of these arrangements, local governing boards have responsibility for assuring the quality of the curriculum that pupils learn. Trust leaders have trained local governing board members on how to do this. However, this knowledge has not been updated recently. This means that the level of scrutiny of the curriculum by local governing boards varies too much.

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

- Each school has the freedom to plan their own curriculum. Trust leaders have deliberately adopted this approach so that each school has a curriculum firmly grounded in their local context. Leaders balance this autonomy with careful oversight of school leaders' curricular work. School leaders work together to share ideas and best practice. For example, they developed a common and detailed personal, social and health education curriculum framework.
- When a new school joins the trust, leaders check the quality of the curriculum. They consider how they can use support from other schools to bring about immediate improvements when needed, for example sharing early years curriculum expertise. This collegiate approach benefits pupils' learning.
- Leaders at all levels have improved schools' reading, English and mathematics curriculums. They have considered the impact of the pandemic on these fundamental aspects of pupils' learning. They have rightly prioritised the need to address gaps in pupils' knowledge. This work has been effective. The appointment of a school improvement leader has increased leaders' capacity to enhance this work.
- In foundation subjects, trust leaders know that there is work to do to ensure that the curriculum is equally strong in all subjects in all schools. This reflects the findings from stage 1 of this summary evaluation. Trust leaders are supporting subject leaders to develop their subject curriculums. However, this support does not consistently focus on the how pupils develop their knowledge and understanding over time. Prior to the pandemic a network of foundation group leaders was beginning to make a difference to curriculum

quality in the foundation subjects. As schools have returned, trust leaders are reinvigorating and accelerating the work of this network.

- Trust leaders actively encourage school leaders to draw on curricular thinking beyond the trust. For instance, subject leaders work with local mathematics networks and engage with subject professional bodies. This motivates staff and helps them stay up to date with wider educational thinking.

Impact of the trust on its academies – Behaviour and Attitudes

- Trust leaders set high expectations for pupils' behaviour. School leaders and wider staff understand these expectations well. Pupils' positive behaviour was highlighted as a strength in stage 1 of this summary evaluation. Adults know each pupil well, and relationships between pupils and staff are based on trust and mutual respect.
- Trust leaders have worked closely with school leaders to create a set of overarching behaviour principles. These principles underpin the trust's values and outline the rights and expectations of pupils, staff and parents. All work together to help pupils become resilient, respectful and responsible citizens. School leaders have used the trust's behaviour principles effectively in order to create their own policy that meets the needs and context of their own individual school communities.
- All information relating to suspensions has recently been brought together on a trust central system. Leaders track and monitor this data carefully so that any trends can be easily identified. Regular visits and discussions between school leaders and trust staff ensure that all leaders have an accurate view of pupils' behaviour throughout the trust. The trust is rightly proud that the number of suspensions is very low.
- Trust leaders also have clear oversight of attendance. Local governing boards regularly scrutinise information about absence and persistent absence. This enables members to provide leaders with appropriate support and challenge. Trust leaders are aware of those schools which require further support to improve attendance. They are taking the necessary steps to help all pupils to attend school regularly.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a key priority for the trust. Trust leaders complete regular safeguarding reviews to ensure that processes and practice are effective across all schools. For example, leaders commission external audits of key documentation to ensure that appropriate checks have been carried out on all staff working with

children. A strong culture of safeguarding was seen in the four inspections that took place during stage 1 of this summary evaluation.

Trust leaders have put together a central policy for safeguarding but have allowed each school to adapt this to reflect their local context. These policies reflect up-to-date government guidance and locally identified safeguarding risks. All staff have received appropriate safeguarding training. This has included sharing knowledge across local authorities about a range of issues.

Safeguarding leaders from trust schools work together closely to construct staff training packages and share best practice. This has ensured that there is a consistent approach to managing concerns and getting help and support for pupils in a timely way.

Headteachers' regular reports to local governing boards ensure that the trustees have a clear oversight of safeguarding. This includes an overview of the number of pupils on child protection plans and those who are being supported through early help.

Trust leaders implement clear systems and processes for the safer recruitment of staff. School leaders receive appropriate guidance and support so that all necessary checks are conducted during the selection process and before new staff begin their employment with the trust.

Recommendations

- Fully implement the trust's plans to develop the capacity of the central team so that all schools continue to benefit from swift and timely support as the trust grows.
- Further enhance the knowledge and skills of all local governing boards to enable them to consistently provide robust support and challenge to school leaders about the curriculum, in line with their delegated duties.
- Precisely focus school improvement and quality assurance processes on critically evaluating all aspects of the curriculum, especially in the foundation subjects.
- Further develop subject leaders and subject networks so that high-quality curriculum support and practice is shared across the trust schools to enhance curriculum development at all ages and stages.

Yours sincerely

Ian Tustian
His 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
145097	William Shrewsbury Primary School	Staffordshire	2017-11-01	Yes	2022-03-10	2
145377	Grange School	Staffordshire	2018-03-01	Yes	2022-07-14	2
145099	Outwoods Primary School	Staffordshire	2017-11-01	Yes	2022-02-09	2
145100	John of Rolleston Primary School	Staffordshire	2017-11-01	Yes	2022-03-03	2
146814	Redbrook Hayes Community Primary School	Staffordshire	2019-02-01	No	2016-01-13	2
147299	Burton Fields School	Staffordshire	2019-06-01	No	2017-09-21	4
148906	Brownhills West Primary School	Walsall	2022-02-01	No	2017-05-24	2
148364	Blackwood School	Walsall	2022-01-01	No	2011-09-23	2

*Schools highlighted received either a graded, ungraded or monitoring inspection in stage 1 of the MAT SE