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3 July 2023

Rowena Hackwood, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Ben Brown, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Astrea Academy Trust
The Quadrant
99 Parkway Avenue
Sheffield
S9 4WG

Dear Mrs Hackwood and Mr Brown

Summary evaluation of Astrea Academy Trust

Following the summary evaluation of Astrea Academy Trust (or 'the trust') in June 2023, when I was accompanied by Zoe Lightfoot and Kristian Hewitt, His Majesty's Inspectors and Zoe Carr, Ofsted Inspector, I am writing on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings.

The summary evaluation has been conducted in accordance with the provisions of the operational note.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the trust between Tuesday 6 June 2023 and Friday 9 June 2023. 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 any recommendations for improvement are set out within this outcome letter.

Context

The CEO took up post in July 2020.

The trust is a multi-academy trust that serves 26 schools. Of these schools, 17 are primary schools, seven are secondary schools, one is an all-through school and one is a special school. The academies are located in Barnsley, Cambridgeshire, Doncaster and Sheffield local authorities. The trust was established in 2015 and took on its first schools in May 2016.

The trust's academies vary in size from 156 pupils in Denaby Main Primary Academy to 1,755 pupils in St Ivo Academy.

Many of the schools in the trust serve communities with high levels of deprivation. Nearly 40% of the pupils in the trust are eligible to receive the government's pupil premium funding compared to 25% nationally. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is also above average. These proportions vary from school to school 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 academies. The trust board delegates some of its responsibilities to local governance committees (LGC). Some schools have a trust management board (TMB) in place of an LGC.

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

- 17 academies are judged to be good
- Eight academies are judged to require improvement
- One academy is judged to be inadequate.

Summary of stage 1

During stage 1 of this summary evaluation, nine academies were inspected from September 2022 to May 2023. All of these inspections were routine inspections and carried out under either section 5 or 8 of the Education Act 2005 (the Act), as amended.

The inspection outcomes were:

- Five schools had their first graded inspection having joined the trust. Three of these schools were judged to be good, one school was judged to require improvement and one school was judged to be inadequate. Of the schools judged to be good, one was newly opened with no predecessor school. In the other two cases, the predecessor schools had been judged to require improvement and to be inadequate.
- Two further schools had a graded inspection and were judged to be good. In both cases, the schools had improved from the previous grading of requires improvement.
- Two schools had an ungraded inspection and continued to be good.

Summary of stage 2

Over the course of the on-site visit to the trust, discussions were held with you both and other senior and operational staff. We met with five representatives of the board of trustees. Meetings were also held with a member of the trust and some chairs of LGCs and TMBs. We visited seven trust schools that had not been inspected during stage 1 of the summary evaluation process. We visited a further four schools that had been inspected during stage 1. In each of the schools that we visited, we met with the principal and other leaders. We met with a range of staff, including those at the early stages of their teaching career. We spoke to pupils in some of the schools that we visited. We spoke to the principals at six trust schools that were not inspected during stage 1.

Impact of the trust on its academies – Quality of Education

- Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum that is increasingly embedded across its schools. Individual schools contextualise the curriculum to their setting and the needs of their pupils. However, primary foundation subject curriculums do not consider sufficiently well the disciplinary knowledge that pupils need to learn to understand important subject-specific concepts. Some schools, working with the support of trust leaders, are developing resources to address this important issue.
- Assessment systems, aligned to common curriculums, are increasingly in place. Trustees are provided with evidence of the impact of the improved curriculum on pupil outcomes. Trust national subject leaders work closely with school curriculum leaders to further develop the leadership of their subject.
- Trust leaders have an accurate view of the provision for pupils with SEND. There are clear trust-wide strategies for identifying pupils with SEND, assessing their needs and quality assuring the impact of actions taken. Leaders work cooperatively with a wide range of external agencies and provisions to ensure that the needs of the individual child are at the centre of decisions taken. Teaching staff benefit from the training and support they receive from central trust staff. This training enables them to meet the needs of pupils with SEND effectively.
- Leaders at all levels are fully committed to embedding a reading culture in all trust schools. Leaders ensure that pupils access quality and vibrant texts throughout their school career. There are reading challenges in both primary and secondary schools, including the '100 must reads'. The trust-wide approach to supporting pupils at the early stages of learning to read ensures consistency and enables staff to share resources and expertise. Trust leaders

ensure that pupils quickly make the progress that they need to become confident readers.

Impact of the trust on its academies – Behaviour and Attitudes

- Leaders at trust and school level have agreed core principles and expectations of pupils' behaviour for all schools in the trust. Within this consistent approach, school leaders have the flexibility to adapt aspects of the policy and frameworks, such as incentives and rewards, to suit the needs of their pupils and the context of their school. As a result, headteachers lead their schools with confidence.
- Leaders know that in a few schools, some pupils do not behave well enough. Leaders are working at speed to improve pupils' behaviour across the trust. Incidences of suspensions and permanent exclusions, although still too high, are decreasing. A very small minority of pupils have received multiple suspensions during the current academic year and are at risk of permanent exclusion. The trust's leaders are implementing bespoke provision to ensure these pupils complete the academic year in their individual schools.
- Trust leaders quickly identify schools with high incidences of unacceptable behaviour. They swiftly provide additional leadership expertise, staffing capacity and training. Staff and pupils at these schools recognise the significant improvement in behaviour over time. They appreciate the recent changes in behaviour policies. They value the calm classrooms and corridors that they increasingly experience. Staff report that this has reduced their workload.
- Trustees know that there is more work to do to further improve pupils' behaviour. Leaders use the trust's new management information system to provide trustees with analyses of pupils' behaviour and rates of suspension. Trustees have recently asked for this information to be broken down for groups of pupils. Currently, while the information is seen by executive leaders, trustees do not know which groups of pupils are more likely to misbehave than others. As a result, leaders' planning is not as tightly focused as it could be at all levels.
- Leaders at all levels are not satisfied with pupils' attendance. Although improving, too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Trust leaders continue to check and analyse pupils' attendance. In most schools, there is an improving picture. In primary schools, attendance is broadly in line with national averages. Leaders are working hard to improve the attendance of secondary pupils. The number of secondary pupils who are persistently absent is falling. Leaders work with external partners to challenge their own

thinking and to ensure, in respect of pupils' attendance, that no stone is left unturned.

Impact of the trust on its academies – Leadership and Management

- On appointment, the CEO recognised the need to move from the previous model of school autonomy to one of collaboration and a rigorous drive towards excellence. Leaders and staff across the trust's schools are united by the vision of addressing disadvantage so that all children 'learn, thrive and lead successful lives'.
- Trust leaders have worked relentlessly to ensure that they are employing the right people, supported by the right systems, to bring about their ambitious vision.
- There are clear lines of accountability and support trust wide. Principals are line managed by regional directors and further supported by national subject national leaders. Quality assurance is well thought out. Accurate data is collected and increasingly well analysed. Senior executive leaders visit schools regularly. There is a palpable sense of collective endeavour which draws on the expertise and oversight of these skilled leaders.
- Whether schools are near the trust's hub in Sheffield or further afield in Cambridge, they all feel part of the same Astrea family. Staff have the same opportunities for professional development and the visible, responsive presence from trust leaders. It is clear that staff networks, curriculum networks, trust-wide training and common systems all contribute to a strong alignment and shared purpose, regardless of postcode. Staff in all schools recognise the significant improvements that the trust had brought about more recently.
- The trust is an outward-facing organisation. Trust leaders actively seek to engage with other educationalists who can stimulate and support them on their collective journey to excellence. Leaders are committed to the professional development of all staff. The Astrea Talent Programme has been developed to give all staff a career progression route through the trust. Leaders, including the CEO, contribute to developments and discussions in the wider education sector.

Impact of the trust on its academies – Governance

- Since the appointment of the CEO, executive leaders have developed a clear, shared ambition for excellence. Everyone across the trust understands and believes in this vision. There is alignment of values across all trust schools.

Leaders and staff demonstrate integrity and act with moral purpose. Pupils are at the centre of everything that the trust does.

- Governance is strong and insightful. Trustees and chairs of the local committees know their schools well and have a direct working relationship with them. They value the performance data that trust leaders provide and use this to question leaders further on the steps they are taking to bring about improvements across the trust.
- Trustees and members carry out their roles well. They understand their responsibilities as set out in the scheme of delegation. They have sharp oversight over the performance of the trust, including their responsibilities for safeguarding and finance. Stage 1 inspection outcomes show that Astrea Academy Trust is a strong and improving trust.
- Leaders are central to the trust's self-evaluation. Trust regional directors and link trustees work closely with school leaders and chairs of local committees. A united team around each school evaluates the school's performance and offers continued support and challenge. Executive leaders ensure that those schools that need additional support receive the help and resources that they need quickly.
- Trust schools that are on a rapid improvement journey benefit from the TMBs that are in place at a local governance level. The strong trust representation on the TMBs, together with the additional oversight from trust leaders, helps these schools to secure sustained improvement. Trust leaders carefully consider the skills and expertise of those who sit on local governance boards. However, leaders have not ensured that all TMBs have the necessary parental representation.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding was judged to be effective in all the schools that were inspected as part of stage 1 of this summary evaluation.

There is rigorous oversight of safeguarding at all levels across the trust. Trust leaders have ensured that all staff have the training and knowledge they need. The mantra 'safeguarding is everyone's responsibility' runs through every aspect of the trust's work.

Executive leaders analyse data regularly and combine this with their deep knowledge of individual schools to identify where further training is needed. Trust safeguarding leaders undertake detailed safeguarding reviews of each school. Trustees and local governors add further scrutiny and fulfil their statutory safeguarding responsibility incisively. External reviews give trust leaders additional assurance that safeguarding

systems are strong. These processes inform both local and trust-wide staff training and the safeguarding updates that individual schools receive.

Trust leaders work with local partners including local authorities to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge of local and national safeguarding issues. There are regular safeguarding network meetings for school designated safeguarding leads (DSLs). DSLs benefit from the training, support and challenge that they receive through the trust. They receive rapid support and advice when they raise a concern.

Trust leaders for safeguarding and personal, social and health education (PSHE) work together to ensure that the PSHE curriculum responds to local and national issues. Together, these leaders support individual schools so that the taught curriculum enables pupils to learn important safeguarding knowledge.

Recommendations

- In some areas of the primary curriculum, leaders have not mapped out clearly the disciplinary knowledge that pupils need to understand important subject-specific concepts. Where this is the case, teachers have a lack of clarity of how to develop this over time. As a result, some pupils' knowledge is more limited. Leaders should ensure that these small steps of knowledge are clearly identified so that pupils learn well across all subjects.
- The newly implemented management information system enables detailed analysis of the groups of pupils who receive repeated suspensions and are at risk of permanent exclusion. However, its use is not yet fully embedded. This limits trustees' ability to support and challenge leaders effectively. Leaders should continue to embed this analysis to further strengthen the trust's actions to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions.
- Some schools in the trust's south Yorkshire hubs do not benefit from having parent representation at local governance level. There are missed opportunities for these schools to benefit from the expected and valuable parental contributions. Leaders should reinvigorate their efforts to recruit parent governors so that all of the trust's schools access this most valuable resource.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education and the applicable DfE regional director. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Eleanor Belfield

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of the trust

Academy Information				Most recent inspection		
URN	Academy name	Local Authority	Date joined trust	Does the inspection relate to the academy in its current form?	Inspection date	OE grade
137594	The Centre School	Cambridgeshire	1/6/17	No	10/5/13	2
143876	Kingfisher Primary Academy	Doncaster	1/2/17	No	9/10/13	2
145864	Astrea Academy Sheffield	Sheffield	1/9/18	Yes	1/12/22	2
137305	St Ivo Academy	Cambridgeshire	1/3/19	Yes	17/11/21	3
137434	Cottenham Village College	Cambridgeshire	1/6/17	Yes	1/11/19	3
138700	The Hill Primary Academy	Barnsley	1/5/16	Yes	5/5/23	2
138701	Highgate Primary Academy	Barnsley	1/5/16	No	20/2/13	2
138702	Carrfield Primary Academy	Barnsley	1/5/16	No	21/2/13	2
143907	Netherwood Academy	Barnsley	1/5/17	Yes	20/10/21	3
145079	Intake Primary Academy	Doncaster	1/10/17	No	26/4/17	2
146501	Astrea Academy Dearne	Barnsley	1/2/19	Yes	11/5/23	2
139297	Greengate Lane Academy	Sheffield	1/8/16	Yes	24/10/18	2
136992	Longsands Academy	Cambridgeshire	1/9/18	Yes	30/10/19	3

Academy Information				Most recent inspection		
URN	Academy name	Local Authority	Date joined trust	Does the inspection relate to the academy in its current form?	Inspection date	OE grade
138415	Gooseacre Primary Academy	Barnsley	1/5/16	Yes	12/3/20	2
144481	Hatfield Academy	Sheffield	1/5/16	Yes	24/3/23	2
144482	Hartley Brook Primary School	Sheffield	1/5/16	Yes	25/4/19	2
144483	Castle Academy	Doncaster	1/6/16	Yes	22/5/19	2
144950	Atlas Academy	Doncaster	1/11/17	Yes	9/3/22	3
143194	Hexthorpe Primary School	Doncaster	1/9/16	Yes	30/1/20	3
142933	Edenthorpe Hall Primary Academy	Doncaster	1/8/16	Yes	10/7/19	2
142937	Lower Meadow Primary School	Sheffield	1/7/16	Yes	6/6/19	2
143514	Denaby Main Primary Academy	Doncaster	1/10/16	Yes	26/9/19	3
143061	Byron Wood Primary Academy	Sheffield	1/8/16	Yes	11/7/19	2
146369	Ernulf Academy	Cambridgeshire	1/9/18	Yes	18/1/23	3
146370	Astrea Academy Woodfields	Doncaster	1/9/18	Yes	18/1/23	4
145933	Waverley Academy	Doncaster	1/4/18	Yes	15/9/22	2

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