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23 June 2023

Alun Williams, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Stuart Warrener, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership
Norton Hill Primary School
Silver Street
Midsomer Norton
BA3 2UD

Dear Alun Williams and Stuart Warrener

Summary evaluation of Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

Following the summary evaluation of Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership (or 'the trust') in June 2023, when I was accompanied by Mary Davies and Christine Bulmer, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 Monday 19 June and Thursday 22 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 trust consists of 17 primary schools, 10 secondary schools including one with boarding provision, and one special school. The schools are located in Bath and North East Somerset, Somerset and North Somerset. The trust was established in 2013.

The trust's primary schools vary in size from approximately 34 pupils in Hemington Primary School to 482 in Peasedown St John Primary School. The trust's secondary

schools range from 136 pupils in Somerset Studio Academy to 1,851 pupils in Norton Hill Academy.

The trust has nine schools with a faith character.

The trust board is made up of 11 trustees. This group is responsible for the strategic oversight and performance of the trust and its schools.

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

- 18 schools are judged to be good
- One school is judged to require improvement
- Nine schools have yet to be inspected since joining the trust.

Summary of stage 1

At stage 1 of this summary evaluation, 10 schools were inspected from September 2022 to April 2023. All 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:

- Four schools received a graded inspection. Two schools improved from requires improvement to good. Two schools retained their grading of good.
- Six schools received an ungraded inspection. Four schools continued to be good. One school continued to be good with evidence of improved performance and one school continued to be good with evidence of a decline in performance.

Summary of stage 2

Over the course of the on-site visit to the trust, discussions were held with you, other trust leaders and operational staff. We met with one member and three representatives of the board of trustees. We visited seven 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, other school leaders and representatives of the local governing board. Inspectors also conducted telephone surveys with 11 headteachers of other schools in the trust.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Quality of Education

- Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership is a high-performing trust. The centrally planned curriculum is well organised and sequenced for primary and secondary phases. Trust leaders allow schools the freedom to adapt the curriculum to suit their individual contexts. They keep close oversight to ensure that all pupils are making the progress they should. School leaders in all phases value the centralised approach. They recognise how this supports the development of expertise and collaboration across schools. The curriculum is having a positive impact on the outcomes of pupils at all phases. It prepares them very well for the next stage in their education, employment or training.
- Reading is a top priority for the trust. Trust leaders have ensured that staff in all phases know how to teach phonics effectively. Regular checks of reading in schools, coupled with a forensic use of assessment, allow trust leaders to pinpoint where improvements are needed. Across all phases, disadvantaged pupils make significant improvements in reading. Published outcomes for English and reading are above the national averages.
- In many subjects, the trust has implemented a model where subject leaders facilitate high-quality development through networks of colleagues. School leaders and staff speak highly of these network groups. Primary staff, for instance, appreciate the opportunity to learn from secondary experts in other schools. However, leaders identify that the network groups are not well established in a few subject areas in the primary phase. Consequently, the level of staff subject-specific knowledge in these areas is more variable than in others.
- The trust is growing and welcoming new specialist and alternative provision schools. Trust leaders recognise the need to establish appropriate structures to support their operational and strategic work. This is essential to ensure a continued focus on high-quality education for all pupils.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Behaviour and Attitudes

- Trust leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. These are shared by staff across schools. Central policies and systems help schools create a culture where excellent behaviour and regular attendance matter. School leaders adjust these policies and systems to ensure that they are suitable for their schools' context and age groups.
- Trust leaders actively monitor pupils' behaviour as part of their routine visits to schools. For example, they track incidents of inappropriate behaviour and

investigate any patterns or trends. Where they identify areas that need fixing, trust leaders provide effective support and clearly define the boundaries to secure rapid progress. As a result, pupils' behaviour improves over time.

- Schools take a proactive approach to teaching and demonstrating what good behaviour looks like. Pupils are clear about expectations and understand why they are important. In some cases, the trust has provided material support to help school leaders 'reset' the culture, such as buying new uniforms. They have also provided funding for parent support assistants to work with families, particularly where attendance is an issue. Consequently, leaders' actions have reduced the number of pupils who are persistently absent.
- Schools inspected in stage 1 of the summary evaluation received good or outstanding judgements for behaviour and attitudes. However, trust leaders are not complacent. They acknowledge the ongoing need to reduce suspensions and improve attendance further, especially for a minority of disadvantaged pupils and for boys. Nonetheless, they have effective systems and processes in place to maintain the upward trajectory of improvement.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Leadership and Management

- School improvement is at the core of trust leaders' work. Under the skilled guidance of the CEO, they embody an unwavering dedication to securing the best outcomes for pupils. Trust leaders have developed a rigorous and effective model for school improvement that aligns with the trust vision. They strategically target support to schools where it is most needed. For example, schools that need to improve receive extra help from trust leaders and external partners. This approach to school improvement has yielded positive results. The trust boasts an impressive track record of supporting schools to enhance their performance over time.
- A culture of high expectations and ambition permeates all aspects of trust leaders' work. Lines of accountability within the trust structure are well defined. For example, trust leaders hold headteachers responsible for their performance through school monitoring visits, target setting and appraisal systems. School leaders view this process as collaborative and an integral part of the 'improvement culture'.
- Trust leaders invest in staff development. They have created a strong professional development offer. Trust leaders meticulously plan their strategy based on trust and school priorities. They quickly identify staff with leadership potential and support them to achieve nationally recognised qualifications.

- There is a trust-wide approach to staff workload and well-being. For example, centralised systems, such as human resources and finance, enable school leaders to focus on improving the quality of education. Trust leaders consult with staff on policies such as assessment to ensure that workload is manageable. Consequently, staff turnover and absences within the trust are low.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Governance

- Governance is highly effective. Trust leaders work with a strong sense of moral purpose and in the best interests of pupils. There is a shared commitment to achieving excellence. Trustees, trust leaders and local governors articulate a clear and straightforward vision: 'a determination that all children should be able to attend a good or better school'. This guides their actions and is fully understood and embraced by all.
- Trust leaders ensure that effective systems are in place for trustees and governors to do their job well. For example, they provide them with 'notes of visits' from monitoring so they can track schools' progress. Trust leaders promote open and transparent communication. A dedicated chairs' group provides local governors with a forum to question and challenge the systems in place.
- Trustees bring a high level of expertise to their positions. They regularly review their skills to ensure that the trust has the right people with the necessary skills on board. Trustees are proactive in helping local governors understand their roles and responsibilities. For example, they attend meetings and scrutinise minutes to ensure effective governance. Trustees and governors fulfil their statutory obligations well.
- Trust leaders and trustees have a clear and accurate understanding of the trust's financial and compliance position. They manage finances and resources astutely to secure improvements in pupils' outcomes.
- Members receive the information they need to assure themselves of the effectiveness of the trust's governance. They have confidence in the trust's leadership, including its growth strategy.

Safeguarding

- Trust leaders place a very high priority on safeguarding. They have implemented high-quality training for school staff, governors and trustees. This gives leaders the knowledge they need to carry out their duties

effectively. Through regular quizzes, trust and school leaders test the impact of training, which helps shape future trust-wide professional development plans.

- Trust leaders have set up a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) steering group. This DSL group meet regularly to share best practice and plan strategic priorities across the trust. For example, they have recently prepared training based on the amendments to Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023, including updated guidance on internet filtering systems.
- Trustees, including governors, review safeguarding policies at least annually. They ensure alignment with other policies and statutory guidance. Trustees receive a 'one-page safeguarding update' for each school. They use this information to challenge the safeguarding culture and understand the impact of policies and systems.
- The trust has developed a curriculum that equips pupils with age-appropriate knowledge and understanding of safeguarding topics. The trust's approach to safeguarding aims to educate and empower pupils to keep themselves and others safe. For example, where necessary, external partners deliver sessions on subjects such as knife crime.
- Ofsted reports for the 10 trust schools inspected in stage 1 of the summary evaluation confirmed the presence of a strong safeguarding culture. The reports highlighted that 'staff understand the importance of safeguarding', and 'are confident in identifying and reporting concerns'. Many reports also acknowledge how 'governors have effective oversight of safeguarding'.

Recommendations

- The trust is entering a new phase of expansion. Consequently, it is considering ways to maximise the positive impact of development, especially through the growth of specialist and alternative provisions. Trust leaders, including trustees, should ensure that there are appropriate structures to support the operational and strategic work across all schools as the trust changes and evolves.
- Trust leaders identify that the staff development programme is not as well established in a few subjects in the primary phase. As a result, the level of staff subject-specific expertise is variable. Trust leaders should continue their programme of staff development to expand existing effective practice across all subject areas in the primary phase.

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

Yours sincerely

Dale Burr
His Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Schools 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
137548	Writhlington School	Bath and North East Somerset	2019-04-01	Yes	2019-05-15	3
136966	Hayesfield Girls School	Bath and North East Somerset	2021-04-01	Yes	2022-11-15	2
141767	Clutton Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2015-03-01	Yes	2018-01-10	2
146409	Westfield Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2018-10-01	Yes	2023-01-25	2
147173	Peasedown St John Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2019-04-01	No	2019-01-16	4
146396	St Julian's Church School	Bath and North East Somerset	2018-12-01	Yes	2023-04-19	2
136894	Preston School Academy	Somerset	2022-02-01	Yes	2023-01-11	2
142941	Welton Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2016-07-01	Yes	2019-06-26	2
142942	Longvernal Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2016-07-01	Yes	2023-02-03	2
136335	Norton Hill Academy	Bath and North East Somerset	2010-10-01	Yes	2023-03-21	2
146424	Shoscombe Church School	Bath and North East Somerset	2018-12-01	Yes	2023-05-04	2
146972	Beechen Cliff School	Bath and North East Somerset	2019-02-01	No	2018-05-23	4
147890	St Mary's CofE Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2020-05-01	No	2019-09-25	4
147126	Critchill Special School	Somerset	2019-06-01	No	2014-09-18	2
146069	Hemington Primary School	Somerset	2018-08-01	Yes	2022-09-23	2

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
144281	Farrington Gurney Church of England Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2017-04-01	Yes	2020-01-28	2
144830	Midsomer Norton Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2017-09-01	Yes	2022-02-01	2
136311	Somervale Secondary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2010-10-01	Yes	2022-06-28	2
142125	Somerset Studio School	Bath and North East Somerset	2019-04-01	No	2018-03-16	2
137202	St Dunstan's School	Somerset	2016-06-01	Yes	2018-07-18	2
140452	St John's CofE Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2018-12-01	Yes	2023-03-29	2
136804	Trinity Church School	Bath and North East Somerset	2016-06-01	Yes	2018-05-10	2
143915	Norton Hill Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2020-09-01	N/A	New school	N/A
145021	Dundry Church of England Primary School	North Somerset	2016-06-01	Yes	2022-12-07	2
147801	St Mark's CofE School	Bath and North East Somerset	2020-05-01	Yes	2022-02-09	2
141149	High Littleton CofE VC Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset	2014-08-01	No	2014-01-24	1
146447	Leigh On Mendip School	Somerset	2018-11-01	No	2010-05-19	1
148830	Buckler's Mead School	Somerset	2021-09-01	No	2019-11-13	4

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