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27 June 2023

Emma Wigmore, Chief Executive Officer  
Mike Ferguson, Chair of the Board of Trustees  
Diocese of Chelmsford, The Vine Schools Trust  
Diocesan Offices  
53 New Street  
Chelmsford  
Essex  
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Dear Mrs Wigmore and Mr Ferguson

## **Summary evaluation of Diocese of Chelmsford The Vine Schools Trust**

Following the summary evaluation of the trust in June 2023, when I was accompanied by Tessa Holledge, His Majesty's Inspector and Duncan Ramsey, 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 Monday 19 June 2023 to 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 23 primary schools. The majority of the academies are located in Essex local authority, with two being based in Thurrock local authority. The trust was established in 2013, and no academies have joined the trust since 2020.

The trust's academies vary in size from around 65 pupils in Ridgewell Church of England Primary School to 447 pupils in St James' Church of England Primary School.

The trust is currently formed uniquely of Church of England schools, based in the diocese of Chelmsford. As schools designated as having a religious character, they are all subject to section 48 inspections.

In the spring 2022 census, 15% of pupils in the trust access special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) support, greater than 12% nationally, although this varies from school to school within the trust.

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

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

- 14 academies are judged to be good
- five academies are judged to require improvement
- one academy is judged to be inadequate
- three academies have yet to be inspected since joining the trust. Two of the three predecessor schools were judged to be good, and one was graded requires improvement.

### **Summary of stage 1**

At stage 1 of this summary evaluation, nine academies were inspected from September 2022 to May 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:

- five schools received graded inspections. Of these, four were graded good and one requires improvement.
- four schools received ungraded inspections. All schools remained good. In one school, the inspection concluded that the school may not have received a good judgement if a graded inspection had been conducted at the same time. Consequently, its next inspection will be a graded inspection under section 5.
- one school in special measures received two monitoring visits in this period. In the most recent visit, it was reported that arrangements for safeguarding were effective and that leaders were taking effective action for the removal of special measures.

## **Summary of stage 2**

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 one of the deputy directors for education and trust leaders of governance, safeguarding & well-being, human resources and finance and estates. We met representatives of the board of trustees, including the chair and vice-chair of the board.

We visited six trust schools that had not been inspected during stage 1 of the summary evaluation process and nine schools in total. In each of these schools, we met with the executive headteachers, the headteachers, other leaders, including designated safeguarding leads, teachers and local school board members with responsibility for local governance.

We also held virtual meetings with headteachers from three additional schools, two of which had not been visited at stage 1.

## **Impact of the trust on its academies – Quality of Education**

The trust has provided direct leadership and support to its schools in order to provide pupils with an improving quality of education. Until recently, this work has been predominantly reactive and in response to specific weaknesses in core standards. As a result, most curriculum development work has been focused on English and mathematics, including early reading and phonics.

In line with the trust's baseline priorities, centralised systems have supported the effective identification of subject and teaching expertise within the schools. This has led to the relevant sharing of best practice between schools, having a positive impact on the curriculum and learning experiences of pupils, including in early reading. Improvements include relevant and efficient use of assessment to help support pupils to make the best possible progress. However, while this has been the case, this work has been narrow in scope. Although there are early positive signs, leaders in the trust have more to do to ensure that high ambitions for curriculum design are widely understood and applied across the breadth of the curriculum. This in turn will ensure there is a sharper focus on the development of foundation subject knowledge for teachers and other staff who deliver the curriculum.

The trust has established systems for monitoring the quality of education that individual schools provide. School improvement leaders play a pivotal and impactful role in providing challenge and support to individual providers. There are sufficient checks to provide assurance about many aspects of the curriculum, including on elements where schools retain autonomy to make local decisions.

Moving forward, the trust has ambition to move schools that are now predominantly secure to become even better. To achieve this, the systems used to monitor and engineer further improvements in the quality of education need to be more explicitly clear about high expectations for the curriculum. This should include reference to all the key aspects that contribute to the curriculum being delivered effectively and ensure the best possible progress for pupils, including those pupils with SEND.

## **Impact of the trust on its academies – Behaviour and Attitudes**

The trust has established shared, centralised policies to outline principles and high expectations for pupils' behaviour, relationships and attendance. Schools have some freedom to adapt and personalise these according to their specific needs, but key values and protocols are standardised and adopted. Targeted advice and training are provided to staff in schools to support the effective personalisation, adoption and implementation of policies. This includes support and training for administration teams who have a key role in managing and tackling pupil absence.

All schools have reliable systems in place to share data and relevant information about pupils' behaviour and conduct. This means the trust, leaders and administration staff are supported to have the information they need to spot data trends and patterns and take swift action, if necessary.

Historic challenges with above-average pupil absence have been tackled by the trust, under the oversight of the safeguarding and well-being lead. Effective use of a working party has been made to draw upon the expertise across the trust and share the best practice identified. As such, schools can be paired for joint working where strengths in provision can support schools facing specific challenges with pupil absence levels. The trust's actions have had a positive impact in schools and attendance rates are steadily improving, including for pupils who are most persistently absent from school.

Behaviour records, including exclusions and suspensions data, are reviewed regularly by executive leaders and the trust board. Analysis of this data leads to relevant challenge, support and assurances that the agreed policies are fit for purpose. Regular central reviews of safeguarding practices also routinely consider pupils' behaviour and attendance.

### **Impact of the trust on its academies – Leadership and Management**

Executive leaders in the trust have provided reliable and hands-on support for school leaders, in line with strategic priorities. Although this work has focused on providing a baseline stability to many schools, central leaders have actively engaged and quickly responded to additional ad hoc requests for improvement made by headteachers.

Trust leaders have set in place reliable systems, including a dashboard of key performance indicators, to check that the quality of education meets their agreed, secure standard. Where needs are identified, schools are provided with expert and skilled school improvement support. This brings focus and helps to simultaneously develop the leadership abilities and expertise of staff. As a result, leadership and management have improved in many key areas, including the core curriculum offer and safeguarding.

Effective use of mentoring, peer coaching and direct leadership support have provided secure models for the ongoing development of leadership at all levels. In the next phase of trust development, the approach taken to develop leaders at all levels need to expand, to routinely include wider aspects of the curriculum that have not been a high priority for some schools. This will ensure leadership and management expertise is grown, by design, to focus on the full breadth of education provision.

The trust board has established mechanisms to oversee and support the well-being of staff. This is a key trust priority, rooted in policy and informing the knowledge and practices of local governors. Staff reflect positively on being part of the trust. They say their well-being is considered, and this ensures that they are not at risk of harassment or unnecessary pressures.

### **Impact of the trust on its academies – Governance**

Arrangements for governance are effective and continue to evolve to match the high aspirations of members and trustees. The trust is led with a commitment to collaboration within teams and across schools. Executive leaders actively support schools so that local leaders are able to focus on meeting the needs of their own staff, families and pupils.

Following a period of significant challenge in the trust, trustees and leaders have prioritised the safety and effective education of its pupils. This has brought the trust into a position of reliable security, laying a foundation for leaders to realise their ambitious vision for further quality and growth. At the centre of the trust's vision is a commitment to delivering an ambitious curriculum. Leaders know there is more to do to ensure this aim is achieved fully in practice.

School leaders are held to account effectively by the trust, including through local school boards of governors. However, leaders have recently identified some varied effectiveness in governance arrangements, including some misinterpretation of delegated responsibilities at local board level. Trust leaders are part way through a transformation agenda to address this inconsistency. This is having a significantly positive impact where changes are already embedded, for example in the work to improve accountability and support improvement in pupils' attendance. In the newly adopted model of local governance, there is distinct clarity about delegated roles and governors are empowered and knowledgeable. This results in very effective oversight from the trust board.

The trustees bring a range of expertise and experience to support the ongoing development of the trust. As such, there are assurances about the effective and sustainable actions the board is taking to support school leaders to focus on educational matters. This support includes accessible and reliable expertise for human resources, finance and capital planning.

### **Safeguarding**

The trust board's oversight of safeguarding is a strong feature of practice. The model for managing and monitoring arrangements is effective and robust. At an executive

level, there is clear strategic leadership provided by a safeguarding and well-being leader. They work directly and closely with leaders across the trust, including strategic links with the work of the leader of governance. This has ensured that policies and precise school systems are highly reliable and well understood. This results in an effective culture of safeguarding across all schools in the trust.

The trust has reliable mechanisms for ensuring statutory obligations are met, including recruitment and vetting checks in each school. There are explicitly clear routines for school leaders to regularly report relevant safeguarding data to the board. The transformation of governance practices underway has already benefitted the now-established accountability routines followed by local governors. They have a very clear understanding of their roles and safeguarding responsibilities. They can confidently monitor and question the data provided and respond with effective action where needed.

## **Recommendations**

- The arrangements for local governance have not been consistently effective. This is because local boards have not fully understood all their delegated responsibilities. This has impacted the ability of trustees to provide the degree of support and challenge they aspire to. Trustees and executive leaders should continue to embed the changes to local governance arrangements already underway. This is to ensure that there are clear lines of delegation and that all local governors are knowledgeable and know how best to connect with the trust board and provide highly effective oversight.
- There is some variation in the quality of curriculum design between schools, particularly within foundation subjects. As a result, pupils' quality of learning is not reliably ambitious across the full breadth of the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that leaders at all levels have a clear, shared understanding of effective curriculum design to support pupils in accessing an ambitious curriculum in all subjects.
- Systems that leaders use to check and support improvement in the quality of education are not consistently explicit about expectations. As a result, trustees do not have the same, high level of assurance about all aspects that contribute to the quality of education, for example the specific impact of provision for pupils with SEND. Leaders should refine their systems to ensure that leaders in all schools have clarity about the trust's ambitious expectations. This will support trustees to access the most relevant information in order to monitor and further support improvement in its schools.

- The approach taken to develop staff expertise across the trust has typically focused on raising standards, especially in the core curriculum. Consequently, there are aspects of subject leadership and teachers' knowledge that are not as well developed. The trust should capitalise upon established routines used for the sharing of best practice to support the further development of teachers' expertise. This will provide further security in the quality of learning pupils receive across the trust.

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

Kristian Hewitt  
**His Majesty's Inspector**



## Annex: Academies that are part of the trust

Academy Information				Most recent graded inspection		
URN	Academy name	Local Authority	Date joined trust	Does the inspection relate to the academy in its current form?	Inspection date	OE grade
140180	Southminster Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/11/2013	Yes	13/07/2022	4
140844	St Cedd's Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/06/2014	Yes	24/05/2017	2
140666	Howbridge Church of England Junior School	Essex	01/09/2014	Yes	11/12/2019	3
141657	St James Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/03/2015	Yes	11/01/2018	2
142252	Latchingdon Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Essex	01/09/2015	Yes	04/05/2023	3
142775	St Osyth Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/05/2016	Yes	17/05/2023	2
140367	Great Clacton Church of England Junior School	Essex	01/09/2016	Yes	09/11/2016	2
141658	Mistley Norman Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/09/2016	Yes	26/11/2021	3
140506	Rolph Church of England Primary School and Nursery	Essex	01/09/2016	Yes	30/06/2022	2
140181	Weeley St Andrew's CofE Primary School	Essex	01/09/2016	Yes	12/10/2022	2
143453	St Margaret's Church of England Academy, Bowers Gifford	Essex	01/10/2016	Yes	29/01/2015	2
143516	St James' Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/10/2016	Yes	19/09/2019	2
144587	Orsett Church of England Primary School	Thurrock	01/07/2017	Yes	22/11/2012	2
144866	Belchamp St Paul Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/08/2017	Yes	25/04/2012	2

Academy Information				Most recent graded inspection		
URN	Academy name	Local Authority	Date joined trust	Does the inspection relate to the academy in its current form?	Inspection date	OE grade
144645	Ridgewell Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/08/2017	Yes	12/01/2022	2
144603	Bulphan Church of England Academy	Thurrock	01/08/2017	Yes	26/01/2022	3
145602	William Martin Church of England Infant and Nursery School	Essex	01/05/2018	Yes	13/09/2022	2
145726	William Martin Church of England Junior School	Essex	01/05/2018	Yes	22/09/2022	2
146106	Rivenhall Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/09/2018	Yes	09/02/2023	2
146898	St Andrew's Church of England Primary School, Great Yeldham	Essex	01/04/2019	Yes	07/03/2013	2
146923	Colne Engaine Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/04/2019	Yes	08/06/2017	2
147413	St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Tillingham	Essex	01/12/2019	Yes	03/07/2015	2
145856	Two Village Church of England Primary School	Essex	01/09/2020	Yes	12/12/2018	3

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