

12 June 2015

Mr Johnson Kane
Chief Executive Officer
The Education Fellowship
The Old Dairy
Grange Road
Islip
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Dear Mr Kane

Focused inspection of The Education Fellowship

Following the focused inspection of a number of Education Fellowship academies and the subsequent follow-up visit by Her Majesty's Inspectors, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

Both Charalambos Loizou HMI and I appreciated your time and cooperation during our visit on 9 and 10 June 2015. Please pass on our thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

Inspection evidence

As part of the focused inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and Additional Inspectors inspected five academies between 2 and 5 June 2015.

Two of these inspections were carried out under section 5; HMI and the Additional Inspector judged both academies to require improvement.

In the three section 8 monitoring inspections, HMI found that:

- leaders were taking effective action in the academy that requires improvement
- the academy with serious weakness was making reasonable progress
- the academy in special measures was not making reasonable progress.

HMI held telephone discussions with the principals of seven other academies in The Education Fellowship between 3 and 5 June 2015. During our follow-up visit to The Education Fellowship, HMI spoke to senior and operational staff from the trust, principals, governors, strategic partners and other stakeholders. They also scrutinised a range of relevant documentation.

Context

Set up in 2012, The Education Fellowship is made up of four secondary and eight primary academies across Windsor and Maidenhead, Wiltshire and Northamptonshire.

You took up the post of Chief Executive Officer of The Education Fellowship in September 2013. The Director of Education was appointed in January 2014. The Board of Trustees carries out the statutory functions of governance, while each academy has an advisory board to provide challenge and support to the principal.

The trust was issued with a financial notice to improve by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) in April 2014. Following a review by the EFA in February 2015, the notice to improve was removed in March 2015.

Summary findings

There is no clear record of improvement in the trust's academies and standards across the trust are unacceptably variable. In around three quarters of the academies, standards are poor.

Just three of the trust's 12 academies are currently good, none are outstanding and two are inadequate. One of these inadequate academies is not making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Standards declined in five of the eight primary academies in 2014. In the majority of the trust's 12 academies, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their better off peers, both within the academies and compared with pupils nationally, remains unacceptably wide.

The executive board knows what it does well and what it needs to do to improve. It has devised an ambitious three-year improvement plan. However, changes in leadership of the trust and poor management of the trust's finances have been a major distraction to the core business of driving up standards in its academies.

Greater improvement can be seen in some of the trust's secondary academies. Compared with national figures, the proportion of academy leavers who are not in education, employment or training is low. HMI judged sixth form provision in the majority of the academies to be good in the most recent section 5 inspections. Leaders in one of these academies have used pupil premium funding particularly well and their systems for tracking the progress of these pupils are robust. However, in most other cases, there is insufficient emphasis on comparing the achievement of disadvantaged pupils with that of all pupils nationally.

Attendance remains too low in the majority of academies, although it is moving closer to the national average in some, and has risen significantly in three of the

primary academies. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is above the national average in the majority of the secondary academies.

The trust receives data about its academies' performance regularly and these are analysed by the Education Data and IT Director. These data are readily accessible and presented in a consistent format across all of the academies. The trust has also established systematic procedures for reviewing the performance of its academies once every three months.

These reviews cover a wide range of activities, including:

- scrutiny of achievement data, self-evaluation documentation and pupils' books
- observations of teaching
- discussions with key leaders, managers and pupils.

While these reviews have resulted in clear points for further action, they have not consistently identified important existing weaknesses in some of the academies. For example, inspectors found instances where self-evaluation documents and assessment of pupils' performance were too generous.

The trust has insufficient capacity to support and challenge all of its academies. Academy leaders are unreservedly supportive and complimentary of the work carried out by the Director of Education. However, the number of academies in the trust and their wide geographical location make it difficult for her to sustain the necessary degree of intervention and support.

You recognised the need for decisive action to tackle the weak leadership of the predecessor schools that resulted in underperformance and a legacy of underachievement and, as a result, have replaced the weakest leaders. However, at this stage, there are not enough strong leaders across all of the academies. This lack of leadership capacity is evident in the fact that the majority of schools in the trust currently require improvement. Plans are in place to add to capacity through, for example, the 'Pathways to Success' programme, which aims to strengthen existing leadership. While this pilot project has been well received by participants, it is at too early a stage to demonstrate any impact.

The trust's academies are encouraged to work together and to use partnerships with other schools more effectively. The stronger senior leaders in the higher performing academies and members of the Executive Board are actively engaging with all the academies in the trust. The trust is aware of its need to strengthen the quality of teaching in many of its academies. Teachers and leaders share good practice across the academies and the trust has recently started to use a limited number of leading teachers. These four teachers work well to develop stronger teaching practice through well-targeted research projects that aim to benefit schools in the trust. However, their work with individual teachers is only just starting to demonstrate a

positive impact on improving the quality of teaching because some of these teachers were slow to acknowledge that they needed support.

The trust makes appropriate use of external partnerships and consultants. These have helped to raise pupils' aspirations to study at university and to increase their self-esteem. For example, 28 pupils from Years 9 and 10 visited Oxford University in May 2015 to take part in academic sessions in computer sciences. The trust actively seeks links with partner organisations. In particular, the trust's links with a well-known retail organisation have helped to create a feeling of ownership and belonging, where the views of both staff and pupils are seen to be important. This co-ownership model aims to provide all stakeholders with the opportunity to challenge one another in order to identify the culture schools within the trust are trying to achieve. This partner has a strong leadership record. Therefore, advice and guidance about effective leadership in order to develop sustainable school improvement have strong foundations based on an effective model, although the impact of this advice and guidance has yet to be seen.

The trust has a model safeguarding policy that has been adapted by its academies to reflect the different nature of the Local Safeguarding Children Boards across the three regions. This makes it particularly effective. Staff in the academies are kept up to date appropriately with safeguarding developments through the trust's visible learning website and through regular training opportunities.

Trustees have rightly paid greater attention to the effectiveness of governance. The board of trustees is small at present, but includes a good range of valuable experience, including educational, financial and human resources. The trustees acknowledge that the impact of the academy advisory boards in all of the academies is not strong enough. Discussions with some of the chairs of the academy advisory boards demonstrated a lack of clarity about their role in contributing to the academies' systems for self-evaluation.

Recommendations

The Education Fellowship must:

- urgently improve the achievement of pupils across both primary and secondary academies, closing the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils in school and other pupils nationally
- develop and strengthen leadership at all levels in those academies that are not yet good
- review the trust's current capacity at Fellowship Team level in order to intensify the degree of direct support and challenge
- develop the work of the lead teachers further in order to improve the overall quality of teaching across the academies and improve pupils' outcomes
- ensure that the academy advisory boards are clear about their role in driving school improvement.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of The Education Fellowship

Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 5 inspections

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement (date)	Inspection grade in June 2015
Risdene Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	06/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy	3
Wrenn School	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	09/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy	3

Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – monitoring inspections

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Most recent s5 inspection grade and date	Monitoring inspection judgement June 2015
Blackthorn Primary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	12/2012	4 (special measures) (2014)	Not making reasonable progress
Olympic Primary School	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	05/2013	3 (2012)	Taking effective action
Pembroke Park Primary School	South West	Wiltshire	04/2013	4 (serious weaknesses) (2015)	Making reasonable progress

Other academies

Academy name	Region	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection grade and date
Clarendon Academy	South West	Wiltshire	12/2012	2 (2014)
Desborough College	South East	Windsor and Maidenhead	10/2012	2 (2014)
Rushden Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	12/2012	3 (2014)
Ruskin Junior School	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	11/2012	3 (2014)
Thorplands Primary and Day Nursery	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	04/2013	3 (2015)
Warwick Primary School	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	11/2012	3 (2014)
Windmill Primary School	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	05/2013	2 (2015)