

Date 21 May 2015

Chris Tweedale
Chief Executive
CfBT Schools Trust
60 Queens Road
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 4BS

Dear Mr Tweedale

Focused inspection of CfBT Multi-Academy Trust

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

Thank you for your cooperation and that of all the staff we met during our visit on 19 and 20 May 2015. We particularly appreciate the time and care taken to prepare the programme for us. Please pass on our thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

Evidence

Six academies were inspected as part of the focused inspection, of which four were inspected for the first time. Two academies were judged to be outstanding, one was judged as good and another required special measures. The two remaining academies received section 8 monitoring inspections and were both judged to be making reasonable progress. Telephone discussions were held with the principals of 13 other academies.

During our follow-up visit to CfBT, discussions were held with senior and operational staff from the central trust team, executive headteachers, consultant headteachers, trustees, representatives of local governance and other stakeholders. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of relevant documentation.

Context

CfBT Schools Trust (CST) was set up by CfBT Education Trust in January 2011. The trust now consists of 19 schools, of which 11 are primary and 8 are secondary. Of

the 19 schools, 15 are academies and four are free schools. Five sponsor-led academies joined CfBT during the academic year 2013/2014. The trust academies are dispersed widely covering 12 local authority areas in five different Ofsted regions.

In 2013, the DfE and CfBT Education Trust recognised significant weaknesses in the trust's capacity to meet the needs of its academies and free schools. You were appointed as Chief Executive of CST in February 2014. The director for finance was also appointed in February and the director for education took up his post in April. CST reports to its own board of trustees which is responsible to the government for the performance of all CST academies.

Summary findings

CfBT took on too many academies too quickly. The trust did not have a clear rationale for the selection of schools, a strategy for creating geographical clusters or a plan to meet academies' different needs. As a result, standards are too low. The trust relied heavily on external consultants but did not ensure their accountability in securing rapid and secure improvement. Headteachers were unable to provide each other with the much needed mutual support or share available expertise. Current CST leaders openly acknowledge these errors.

As a result, while some academies have improved well or sustained their performance, too many have not. While more than half of the trust's academies are good or outstanding, nearly a third are inadequate: four of the 19 academies are in special measures and two have serious weaknesses.

In 2014, pupils within the trust achieved broadly in line with national figures at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2. Key Stage 4 standards were well below the national average. The gap in achievement between disadvantaged pupils in the trust and other pupils nationally is a concern. Disadvantaged pupils make significantly less progress than their peers. The gap widened between 2013 and 2014, particularly within the secondary sector. Predicted outcomes for 2015 indicate modest improvements overall but GCSE examination results are expected to remain below the 2014 national average. The gap in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers is expected to narrow this year but data indicate the gap will remain too wide.

On your appointment, you quickly recognised the limitations of the team to meet the varied needs of all academies across the trust. You identified the necessary priorities and determined the required support. You created a clearly structured team to provide better challenge and support for individual academies, establishing clear expectations and lines of responsibility.

The education team provide valuable, intensive, emergency support in response to inspections where academies are judged to be inadequate. You and the education director intervene appropriately to remove weak leaders, including governors, and

teachers. In addition, you provide effective on-going support for headteachers appointed to the academies in difficulty. Headteachers understand their responsibility and accountability for ongoing improvement.

The trust now has a better understanding of how well its academies are performing. The education director and his team know the trust's academies well and have a clear understanding of their context, strengths and areas requiring improvement. This education team have regular and purposeful contact with individual academies and free schools. Records of their visits show evidence of joint lesson observations, examinations of pupils' work and analysis of pupils' progress which lead to precise evaluation and clear, challenging feedback. These graded evaluations are regularly reported back to the education team leaders to help them monitor the rate of improvement across the trust. The education team meetings are suitably focused on the quality of academy leadership and teaching, as well as pupils' overall standards of achievement.

Academies are now beginning to receive better support and challenge. Recently appointed members of the education director's team, 'education leaders', visit academies fortnightly to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, consider self-evaluations and provide the necessary focused support. Education leaders are beginning to broker external expertise where appropriate, including from subject or phase specialists. Since the recent expansion of the education team communication between the trust and the academies has improved.

These recent measures to support and challenge individual academies are at an early stage of implementation. As a consequence, there remains a mixed picture of improvement across the trust. Decline has not yet been fully arrested. For example, a school previously judged to require special measures opened as a new trust academy two years ago. The academy was included in the focused inspection and was judged to be inadequate.

Headteachers' performance management is improving. The process is now more rigorous and is underpinned by the trust's clear expectations of academy leaders. Senior trust representatives are present at every headteacher performance management meeting and they provide rigorous challenge where performance causes concern. Nevertheless, headteachers' performance management targets are not closely linked to improving the underachievement of specific groups of students.

The trust does not do enough to evaluate its own impact on individual academies' effectiveness or pupils' outcomes. The trust's data on pupils' current rates of progress do not break down outcomes by groups, for example looked after children and care leavers, those with poor attendance or at risk of exclusion. CST has not developed a coherent cross-trust strategy to improve the provision made for these pupils or target additional support when necessary.

The education team commissions support from within the trust where possible. The School Partnership Programme is strongly focused on improving the quality of teaching and has been well received across the trust. The process of peer review helps headteachers to reflect on practice and learn from each other. Other partnerships between academies have helped to strengthen aspects of the curriculum, develop subject and middle leaders and provide sustained coaching. Academies are beginning to work more closely together on shared projects, such as in recent useful work to develop assessment without levels. However, there is not, as yet, a sufficiently systematic approach to identifying and sharing the best practice across the trust. The trust has recently appointed seven specialist teachers of English, mathematics and science to work with subject leaders across secondary academies. Their roles and priorities have been carefully defined to focus on strengthening teachers' subject knowledge and disseminating successful teaching strategies within and between academies.

Trustees are open about the trust's first three years and they are realistic about the journey ahead. They are clear about their purpose and suitably aware of the priorities for improvement. The revised scheme of delegation is almost complete. It includes a well-defined structure of roles and responsibilities and clear terms of reference. Where trustees have concerns about the educational performance of an academy they act decisively, replacing the local governing body with a 'rapid improvement board'. This strategy successfully and speedily introduces the necessary knowledge and expertise to drive improvement where it is needed most.

The trust provides a clear and coherent safeguarding policy for its academies. The policy reflects the most up-to-date guidance. The trust's safeguarding team, although new to the role, visits academies regularly to check that the safeguarding policies are implemented correctly. The team has quickly established knowledge about the academy sites and premises in order to assess health and safety risks. However, information regarding attendance and exclusions is not systematically gathered or reported to the education team.

Recommendations

- Develop systems to measure the impact of CST's challenge, intervention and support for its academies and free schools.
- Develop detailed systems to track the progress of disadvantaged pupils, those at risk of exclusion and pupils with high rates of absence across the trust.
- Track the location and academic progress of looked after children and care leavers to secure provision for this most vulnerable group.
- Identify trends of underachievement across the trust in order to better identify emerging weaknesses, stem decline and accelerate pupils' progress at all key stages.
- Complete and implement the new scheme of delegation for local governing bodies so that everyone is clear about their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.

- Establish a systematic approach to identifying and sharing best practice across the trust.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of CfBT Schools Trust

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 May 2015
Lincoln Carlton Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	10/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy.	1
Abbey Woods Academy	South East	Oxfordshire	09/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy.	Special Measures
Abacus Belsize Primary School	London	Camden	09/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy.	1
Judith Kerr Primary School	London	Southwark	09/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy.	2

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 May 2015
Danum Academy	North East	Doncaster	10/2011	Special Measures	Reasonable progress
Benjamin Adlard Primary School	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	04/2012	Special Measures	Reasonable progress

Other academies

Academy name	Region	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection grade and date
St Mark's C of E Academy	London	Merton	09/2006	2 (October 2012)
Oxford Spires Academy	South East	Oxfordshire	01/2011	2 (July 2013)
All Saints Junior School	South East	Reading	09/2011	1 (July 2013)
Mount Street Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	10/2011	1 (November 2013)
Ely College	East of England	Cambridgeshire	01/2012	Special Measures (March 2015)
The Deepings School	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	02/2012	1 (June 2013)
Boston West Primary School	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	07/2012	Not yet inspected
Oakbank	South East	Wokingham	08/2012	Requires Improvement (June 2014)
Meadow Park Academy	South East	Reading	09/2012	Serious Weakness (July 2014) School's action plan fit for purpose: sponsor's action plan not fit (November 2014)
Queensbury Academy	East Of England	Central Bedfordshire	09/2012	2 (June 2014)
Grampian Primary Academy	East Midlands	Derby	12/2012	1 (June 2014)
Sir John Glead School	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	01/2013	Serious Weakness (March 2015) previously Special Measures
Gladstone Park Primary	London	Brent	06/2014	Not yet inspected