

8 March 2016

Ms Karen Bromage
Acting Chief Executive Officer
School Partnership Trust Academies
Unit 2, Carolina Way
Wisconsin Drive
Lakeside
Doncaster
DN4 5RA

Dear Ms Bromage

Focused inspections of School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA)

Following the focused inspections of six SPTA (or 'the Trust') academies and the subsequent follow-up visits to the Trust 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.

Thank you for your cooperation and that of all the staff who we met during the visit on 1 and 2 December 2015 and the subsequent follow-up visit on 21 January 2016. Please pass on my thanks to all those who kindly gave up their time to meet with inspectors.

Focused inspections of a sample of the Trust's academies were last carried out in June 2014.

The findings from the latest sample of focused inspections and a wider consideration of the Trust's overall performance are set out below.

Summary of main findings

- The impact of the Trust's work in bringing about improvement where it is most needed has been too slow. Where standards have been intractably low for some time, the Trust is not driving significant, sustained improvement.
- The standard of education provided by the Trust is not good enough in around 40% of its academies inspected so far. Seventeen of the 24 primary

academies are judged to be good or better; the figure for secondary academies is only five out of 14 ¹.

- The Trust has had a greater impact on improving the overall effectiveness of its primary, compared to its secondary, academies.
- Eleven primary academies have improved their overall effectiveness grade since joining the Trust. Nine of these academies improved from less than good, to good or better. Conversely, only five of the secondary academies have improved, three of them getting to good.
- The Trust has not yet achieved one of its stated aims to provide an improving quality of education for all pupils who attend one of its academies.
- The Trust has not fully addressed all the recommendations from the previous focused inspections in June 2014. Weaknesses remain in the performance of some secondary academies, and in aspects of governance relating to the leadership of improvement.
- The outcomes of the six focused inspections failed to demonstrate that the Trust is consistently improving its academies. Two of the academies failed to improve their overall effectiveness and continued not to provide a good enough standard of education for the pupils; a third was judged not to be taking effective action to move from requires improvement to good at its next section 5 inspection.

Evidence

Focused inspections of six of the Trust's academies were carried out between 23 and 27 November 2015. Two of these inspections were carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) (the Act). Four inspections were carried out as monitoring visits under section 8 of the Act.

The outcomes of the section 5 focused inspections were:

- one academy continued to require improvement
- one academy continued to require special measures.

The outcomes of the section 8 focused monitoring inspections were:

- one academy was assessed not to be taking effective action to be judged good at its next section 5 inspection
- three academies were judged to be taking effective action to remove the need for special measures.

Telephone discussions were held on 25 November 2015 with either the Principal or Executive Principal of 12 other academies in the Trust. During follow-up visits,

¹ This figure includes a secondary academy taken over by the Trust in September 2015.

discussions were held with you and other senior and operational staff from the Trust. A range of relevant documentation was also scrutinised.

Context

The Trust was established in 2010. It is an exempt charity, with directors appointed on a voluntary basis. It operates as a single multi-academy sponsor and acts as the single employer for all its academies. The Trust is responsible for 46 academies from 11 different local authorities. There are 28 primary and 13 secondary academies, and one all-age academy. Additionally, the Trust includes a pupil referral unit, two schools that provide alternative provision for pupils from other academies in the Trust and some local authority schools; and one free school.

The Chief Executive retired shortly after the start of the autumn term. You took up post as Acting Chief Executive on 30 November 2015. The Trust is looking to appoint a permanent CEO in the very near future.

Main findings

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

- five are outstanding
- 18 are good
- 12 require improvement ²
- four are inadequate
- seven are yet to be inspected.

This means that around 60% of the Trust's academies that have been inspected provide a good enough quality of education for pupils. The picture is better for the Trust's primary academies with 17 of the 24 judged good or better. By contrast, only five of the Trust's 14 secondary academies are at least good.

Inspections of the primary academies that are judged to be less than good identified the following weaknesses:

- a slow pace of improvement due to weaknesses in leadership and management
- persistent weaknesses in the quality of teaching that prevent pupils making good progress
- gaps between outcomes for different groups of pupils not closing quickly, for example, for disadvantaged and more able pupils.

² One secondary academy that requires improvement joined the Trust in September 2015.

Inspections of the secondary academies that are judged to be less than good identified the following weaknesses:

- insufficient impact of senior leaders on driving improvement
- ineffective middle leadership in almost all the academies, either due to lack of direction or insufficient impact of training to develop leadership skills
- weaknesses in the quality of teaching, including low expectations of what pupils can achieve
- inconsistent support and challenge from the Trust.

Since its inception in 2010, the Trust has had variable impact on individual academy performance. This is continuing to be a problem, as evidenced by the findings of the recent focused inspections. Although senior leaders are aware of this variation, and have made efforts to bring about the necessary improvements, 16³ of the academies continue to underperform, to the detriment of their pupils.

Improvement in the quality of education provided has been much more pronounced in the primary than in the secondary academies. Of the Trust's primary academies inspected more than once, 12 improved and two declined in their effectiveness between the most recent and previous inspections. While this represents considerable improvement, the proportion of good or better primary academies at 71% remains well below the national figure of 86%.

The overall quality of education provided by the Trust's secondary academies and the rate of improvement of those that are less than good is a concern. The Trust's mixed impact on improving its secondary academies is illustrated by the inspection outcomes. Only five of the 13 academies that have been inspected, and for which the Trust has had responsibility in the 2014/15 academic year, are good or better. At the most recent inspection of these 13 academies: five improved; one remained outstanding; four continued to require improvement; two remained in special measures; and one declined into special measures.

Overall standards across the Trust's primary academies at the end of Key Stage 2 improved between 2014 and 2015, although by a smaller margin than seen nationally. At individual academy level results were mixed. Of the 27 academies for which Key Stage 2 performance information is available, 14 saw a decrease in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics over this period, while 12 saw an improvement.

Pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the Trust's primary academies in 2015 did not show a marked or sustained improvement from 2014, hovering around or just below the national figures.

³ This figure includes one secondary academy that joined the Trust in September 2015.

In 2015, attainment and progress were weak in a significant minority of the Trust's secondary academies. It was broadly the case that the academies with the highest attainment in 2014 improved, but the weaker ones declined.

Of the 13 secondary academies under the Trust's control prior to September 2015, seven saw fewer than 40% of pupils achieve five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics. Twelve of these academies have been under the Trust's control for at least two years.

Overall, the secondary academies delivered a modest improvement in the proportion of pupils making expected progress in English in 2015, but worryingly they saw a decline in the same measure for mathematics. There is considerable room for improving the progress of pupils in both core subjects to bring progress at least in line with the national levels.

Disadvantaged pupils in the Trust's secondary academies do not make good enough progress by the end of Key Stage 4. In 2015, disadvantaged pupils made progress in English below the national level in six academies, and below the national level in mathematics in ten academies.

While the Trust has tried to respond by providing more challenge and support for secondary academies this year with an action plan to improve the quality of English and mathematics provision, the work has been too slow in coming and is showing little impact.

The Trust's website states that almost all procedural and statutory powers in relation to the operation of each academy are delegated to its Educational Advisory Board (a sub-committee of the main Trust Board) and Principal, through a published handbook and scheme of delegation. A review of a sample of academy websites indicated widely differing information about governance arrangements. None of the academy websites reviewed had an obvious link to the Trust's master funding agreement.

Concerns identified in June 2014 around aspects of governance remain. Not all Education Advisory Boards are represented at each keeping in touch meeting between senior Trust officers and Principals. Such absences, while infrequent, increase the potential to diminish the impact of these important strategic meetings at individual academy level when the leadership of monitoring, challenge and support are discussed.

Variability in the Trust's impact is a consistent theme. This is highlighted in inspection reports for the secondary academies that require improvement or are inadequate. For example, the strong impact of the Trust and the effective support its officers provide to leaders are clearly identified in some inspection reports. Conversely, insufficient challenge from Trustees around the progress of

disadvantaged pupils, and a lack of sharply-focused support to tackle wide ranging inadequacies are highlighted in other inspection reports.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a strong feature of the Trust's work. A common approach to safeguarding, with sufficient flexibility allows individual academies to adapt central policies effectively to meet their needs and contexts.

Robust electronic systems remind academies, especially governors, principals and site managers, of required health and safety checks. There has been effective training and information dissemination for academies and the Trust core team regarding PREVENT duties in line with recent guidance.

The combination of all these actions is helping to ensure that the SPTA safeguarding policy leads and directs the effective safeguarding practice in each of its academies.

Recommendations

- Urgently improve the impact of work to improve outcomes for pupils, particularly in secondary academies that are not yet good.
- Ensure that all planned Trust/individual academy meetings, where the focus is on aspects of academy performance, always include the Chair or a suitable representative from the Education Advisory Board.

Yours sincerely

Nick Hudson

**Regional Director
North East, Yorkshire and the Humber**

Annex: Academies that are currently part of School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA)

**Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 5 inspections
24 November to 2 December 2015**

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Inspection grade in November 2015
De Warne Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	September 2009	Grade 3 – requires improvement	Grade 3 – requires improvement
Queen Elizabeth's Academy	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	January 2012	Grade 4 – special measures	Grade 4 – special measures

**Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 8 monitoring inspections
24 November to 2 December 2015**

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Monitoring Inspection: November 2015
Don Valley Academy & Performing Arts College	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	September 2011	Grade 4 – special measures	Special measures visit 3 Taking effective action
Leamington Primary & Nursery Academy	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	September 2013	Grade 3 – Requires improvement	RI visit – Not taking effective action
Melior Community Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	North Lincolnshire	January 2013	Grade 4 – special measures	Special measures visit 3 Taking effective action
Wainwright Primary Academy	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	September 2012	Grade 4 – special measures	Special measures visit 4

					Taking effective action
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Academies that were part of the focused telephone calls 24 November to 2 December 2015

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent Inspection grade
Ash Hill Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	September 2011	Grade 3 – Require improvement	Grade 3 – requires improvement
Craven Primary Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Kingston Upon Hull	November 2013	Not previously inspected	Not yet inspected.
England Lane Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	December 2013	Not previously inspected	Not yet inspected.
Garforth Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds	November 2010	Grade 1 – outstanding	Grade 1 – outstanding
Grange Lane Infant Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	September 2011	Grade 2 – good	Grade 2 – good
Ingleby Manor Free School & Sixth Form	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Stockton-On-Tees	September 2014	Not previously inspected	Not yet inspected.
Rossington All Saints Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	April 2011	Not previously inspected	Grade 2 – good
Rowena Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	November 2011	Grade 1 – outstanding	Grade 1 – outstanding
Simpson’s	North East	Wakefield	August 2012	Grade 2 - good	Grade 2 - good

Lane Academy	Yorkshire and Humber				
St Wilfrid's Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	September 2014	Not previously inspected	Not yet inspected.
The Grove Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	North Yorkshire	September 2013	Grade 1 - outstanding	Grade 1 – outstanding
Whetley Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Bradford	December 2012	Not previously inspected	Grade 2 - good

Other Trust academies

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection grade	Most recent inspection date
Crookesbroom Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	April 2012	Grade 2 – good	January 2015
De Lacy Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	April 2012	Grade 3 – requires improvement	February 2015
East Garforth Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds	September 2013	Grade 3 – requires improvement	June 2015
Estcourt Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and	Kingston upon Hull City of	April 2014	Grade 2 - good	March 2011

	Humber				
Green Lane Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds	November 2010	Grade 1 - outstanding	June 2009
Hatfield Woodhouse Primary School	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	April 2012	Grade 2 – good	January 2015
Highfields Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	April 2012	Grade 2 - good	March 2013
Hull Trinity House Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Kingston upon Hull City of	April 2012	Grade 2 - good	February 2012
John Whitgift Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	September 2011	Grade 3 – requires improvement	March 2014
Kingston Park Academy	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	December 2012	Grade 3 – requires improvement	June 2014
Macaulay Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	November 2012	Grade 2 - good	June 2014
Manor Croft Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Kirklees	September 2013	Grade 3 – requires improvement	July 2015
Mersey Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Kingston upon Hull City of	October 2013	Grade 2 - good	June 2015

Park View Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds	September 2012	Grade 2 – good	June 2014
Pheasant Bank Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	September 2011	Grade 3 – requires improvement	September 2014
Serlby Park Academy	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	September 2011	Grade 2 – good	February 2013
South Leeds Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds	September 2009	Grade 3 – requires improvement	November 2014
Strand Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	October 2012	Grade 3 – requires improvement	June 2014
The Elland Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds	September 2014	Not yet inspected	Not yet inspected
The Parks Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Kingston upon Hull City of	December 2013	Not yet inspected	Not yet inspected
The Vale Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North Lincolnshire	September 2011	Grade 2 – good	March 2013
The Vale Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	July 2012	Grade 1 - outstanding	May 2013
Weelsby Academy	North East,	North East Lincolnshire	July 2012	Grade 2 – good	March 2014

	Yorkshire and Humber				
Willoughby Road Primary Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North Lincolnshire	April 2014	Not yet inspected	Not yet inspected
Willow Green Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	August 2012	Grade 2 – good	March 2014
Willows Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	May 2013	Grade 2 – good	March 2015
Worlaby Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North Lincolnshire	August 2012	Grade 2 – good	February 2015
Wybers Wood Academy	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	December 2012	Grade 3 – requires improvement	June 2014