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Sue Samson
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Dear Ms Samson

Focused review of University of Chichester Academy Trust

Following the focused inspection of four schools in the University of Chichester Academy Trust in July 2017 and my subsequent follow-up visit with Gary Holden, Her Majesty's Inspector, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings of the review.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the trust on 19 and 20 July 2017. We appreciated the time and care taken to prepare the programme of meetings for us. Please pass on our thanks to all those who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

The findings from the focused review and a wider consideration of the trust's overall performance are set out below.

Summary of main findings

- The quality of education in the trust's schools is improving rapidly.
- The University of Chichester is fully committed to the academy trust. There is close alignment between the trust's values of aspiration, inclusion and collaboration, and those of the wider university.
- The university's Institute of Education provides schools with valuable expertise in the curriculum, teaching and learning, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The trust has a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the schools in the trust and uses this knowledge to put in place well-targeted challenge and support.
- The trust provides its schools with very effective support for finance, human resources and estate management. This enables school leaders to focus on school improvement.

- The oversight of safeguarding in the trust's schools is strong.
- Trust leaders use well-established and effective systems to monitor, evaluate and support the work of school leaders.
- Trustees are well-informed about, and have significant influence over, the trust's finances and plans for growth. However, their understanding of the performance of trust schools is less well developed. As a result, the level of challenge trustees provide to officers on pupils' outcomes is not as detailed or as probing as it is on finance, estates and human resource matters.
- Trustees and officers share a strongly held view that each school is unique and should develop its individual identity. At the same time, the trust has established very rigorous structures that ensure consistent management systems and clear lines of accountability.
- Leadership and management have been judged good or outstanding in all schools inspected since joining the trust, even when the overall effectiveness is not yet good. Governing bodies are clear about their role and accountabilities, due to the trusts' effective management of delegation.
- The headteachers and chairs of governors of all of the schools play an important role in the leadership of the trust through forums such as the termly advisory group. Consequently, officers, headteachers and members of local governing bodies share a strong sense of common purpose.
- Independent academy improvement partners play a vital role in the development of individual schools. They provide robust challenge and broker tailored support for each school. They quality-assure the school improvement work of staff from the university's Institute of Education and other providers. They also evaluate the impact of actions taken by school leaders.
- This high-quality, well-planned partnership working is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching and faster rates of pupils' progress across the schools. As a result, outcomes are improving across the trust, from low starting points in some cases. The trust recognises that end-of-key-stage outcomes need to improve further.
- There are well-formed plans for sustainable growth as more schools join the trust.

Evidence

Focused inspections of four of the trust's schools were carried out between 11 and 13 July 2017. All of these inspections were carried out under section 5 or section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and led by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). The inspection outcomes were:

- Two schools were judged to be good. One of these schools had required improvement at its previous inspection. The other was a new school, not previously inspected. In the latter school, leadership and management were judged to be outstanding.

- One school, not inspected since joining the trust, was judged to require improvement. The school was graded inadequate before joining the trust. Leadership and management and early years provision were judged to be good.
- HMI completed a monitoring inspection to a school previously found to require improvement and judged that school leaders were taking effective action to improve the school.

Telephone discussions were held on 12 and 13 July 2017 with either the headteacher or executive headteacher of five other schools in the trust. During the follow-up visits, discussions were held with you and other senior leaders from the trust. HMI also met with trustees, including the chair of the board, chairs of some local governing bodies and a group of headteachers. HMI held further discussions with three academy improvement partners and two representatives from the university's Institute of Education. A range of relevant documentation was also scrutinised.

Context

- The University of Chichester Academy Trust was formed in 2013. The trustees' vision is: 'for all young people to be inspired by an excellent education that raises their aspirations and enriches their lives.'
- The trust comprises 10 schools, nine of which are primary schools and one of which is a secondary school. Six of the schools are academy converters, while four are sponsor-led.
- The first school to join the trust, Frogmore Junior School, opened in Hampshire in September 2013 as a primary, sponsor-led academy. Most of the remaining schools joined the trust in 2014 and 2016. More recently, one school joined the trust in May 2017 and another in July 2017.
- The University of Chichester Academy Trust operates in three local authorities across the South East: Hampshire, where it controls three schools; Portsmouth, where there are five schools; and West Sussex, where the trust is in charge of two schools. The trustees are committed to a policy of 'measured growth', with the ambition to develop, over time, a family of around 30 schools, linked together in three regional hubs.
- At their most recent inspections, Ofsted has judged eight out of the 10 schools in the trust to be good, while the remaining two schools were judged to require improvement. Three sponsor-led schools were graded inadequate before they joined the trust. One of these is now graded good and two are graded requires improvement, although both have good features. Five of the schools which converted were judged good before joining the trust, including the four schools which have joined since September 2016. One school which converted was judged to require improvement before it joined the trust and is now good. The brand new sponsor-led school was recently graded good.

- One of the schools which converted to the trust in September 2016 met the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school, based on key stage 2 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The school's overall effectiveness at its last Ofsted inspection was good in October 2014 and it has not been inspected since joining the trust.
- In the trust as a whole, over a third of pupils are disadvantaged, compared with the national figure of 27%. Two of the schools in Portsmouth have very high levels of deprivation compared with the national average.
- Outcomes for 2016 showed that progress and attainment by pupils in the trust overall were below national averages at key stage 2.

Main findings

- As sponsor, the University of Chichester demonstrates a strong commitment to the academy trust. The vice-chancellor of the university chairs the trust board and is passionate about the role of the university in supporting schools, in particular those which serve disadvantaged communities. The trust's vision to inspire young people, raise aspirations and transform life chances is shared by the school leaders and governors. Strong and effective relationships exist between trustees, the trust's officers, governors and headteachers. All of these groups work together well to lead the development and growth of the trust. As a result, leadership, teaching and outcomes in schools are improving.
- Trustees and senior officers share a strongly held belief that each school is unique and should develop with its own individual identity, in order to meet more fully the needs and aspirations of the community it serves. At the same time, trustees and officers recognise that robust systems and processes are necessary to support the work of school leaders and ensure appropriate consistency between schools. This combination of respect for the individual identity and journey of each school with strong support for school improvement, finance and human resources is a distinctive feature of the trust.
- Well-established processes of accountability are leading to improvements in the quality of education across trust schools.
- Trust leaders have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of all of the schools in the trust. Self-evaluation is accurate and improvement plans for individual schools are sharply focused. Where applicable, priorities include areas for improvement identified in previous Ofsted inspections. A systematic annual plan for school improvement ensures that support is well-targeted and actions taken are regularly evaluated, leading to sustained improvement.
- The determined and highly effective chief executive officer and director of finance have developed a robust monitoring and evaluation policy, which applies to all aspects of the work of the trust's schools. Regular review of the performance indicators in the trust's strategic plan ensures that trust leaders are very well informed about governance, financial management, human resources and the

school's premises. This helps to ensure that they are not distracted from their core job of improving teaching and pupils' achievement. It also helps to ensure that all decisions about finance, human resources and other professional services are carefully linked to improving pupil achievement. For example, the trust's rigorous approach to recruitment ensures that only the best candidates are accepted for teaching posts in schools. In addition, the director of finance checks that school budgets are used appropriately to support the progress of pupils.

- The chief executive and the director of standards and effectiveness have oversight of a group of high-calibre, independent academy improvement partners, who work with school leaders to drive educational improvement. The academy improvement partners provide strong challenge and support. The impact of their work was clearly seen by HMI during the focused school inspections. The academy improvement partners are selected and deployed carefully to meet the particular circumstances of the individual schools. For example, the academy improvement partner for the trust's newly opened school, Berewood Primary School, has experience of setting up and running new schools. Trust leaders scrutinise the work of academy improvement partners carefully, and hold them to account for its quality and impact.
- Academy improvement partners challenge school leaders to conduct accurate self-evaluation, based on a wide range of evidence. Academy improvement partners work with school leaders, governors and trust officers to construct a 'journey to excellence' plan. There are high levels of consistency between schools in the way these plans are drawn up. Each academy improvement partner draws on the journey to excellence plan to develop a support plan to address the school's needs, which is in turn used to broker carefully targeted support, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The director of standards and effectiveness directs the work of the academy improvement partners and the support offered to schools, drawing on the expertise of specialists from the university's Institute of Education or other providers more local to the schools. The academy improvement partners check the effectiveness of the support provided to bring about improvements in teaching and pupils' progress.
- School improvement specialists from the university's Institute of Education provide focused support for pupils alongside training for staff in the trust's schools. The University of Chichester also provides an artist in residence for the schools regularly, and the university's new engineering and digital technology park offers opportunities to enrich the curriculum further. However, most subject-based school improvement provision is for English and mathematics and headteachers would appreciate more support for the wider curriculum.
- High expectations, robust challenge, strong levels of accountability and well-targeted support are leading to rapid improvement in individual schools. Trustees and trust leaders have secured improvements in outcomes in the four schools inspected in July 2017, which have all been members of the trust for at least three years. Two other schools which are long-standing members of the trust

were judged to be good and improving when inspected earlier this academic year.

- Evidence gathered during this review demonstrates improvements in the infant and junior schools which both joined the trust in September 2016. The new post of executive headteacher for these two schools is leading to improved cooperation between staff and better arrangements for pupil transition between the two schools.
- Headteachers, including those who have recently joined the trust, are united about the benefits that sponsorship by the university brings. They believe it promotes aspiration for their pupils to continue with education. Pupils enjoy visiting the campus to familiarise themselves with a university site and enjoy some of the facilities, such as the climbing wall.
- Participation in the university's teacher training arrangements gives schools access to well-qualified trainees. In many cases, these trainees go on to secure full-time employment in trust schools. Furthermore, headteachers recognise that opportunities to mentor trainee and newly qualified teachers help schools to retain experienced staff. As a result, schools are fully staffed, despite regional difficulties in recruiting well-qualified staff.
- Governors identify with the trust strongly. They feel listened to and valued. The chair of the local governing body and headteacher from each school form an advisory group which meets three times a year and which provides them with an opportunity to shape trust policy, in discussion with trust officers. This enhances the effectiveness of governance across the trust.
- The trust delegates powers to local governing bodies depending on their capacity and effectiveness. Trust officers review the work of local governing bodies carefully by regularly attending meetings and scrutinising minutes. The level of support and monitoring is adjusted to meet the school's needs. In schools which require the greatest improvement, there is an interim local governing body, which provides close scrutiny, robust challenge and effective support.
- Trust officers are sensibly reviewing governance across the trust, in order to streamline lines of accountability. This is part of preparations for the time when more schools join the trust, at a predicted rate of about three schools a year.
- Schools have access to expert assistance in financial and legal matters, human resources and premises management. School leaders value this effective support highly. For example, staff from the university's estates department carry out an annual premises review in each school. In addition, they have been advising on the new building work taking place in two trust schools. This enables school leaders to focus on improving teaching and learning.
- Although the progress of current pupils is improving, published outcomes are below national levels. In 2016, pupils made less progress than nationally between key stages 1 and 2 and key stages 2 and 4. At key stage 1, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard was broadly in line with national levels in all subjects. The proportion of pupils achieving a greater depth was above

national levels. At key stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was lower than the national average in reading, writing and in mathematics. At key stage 4, attainment and progress scores were lower than national averages. Overall, attainment and progress scores for disadvantaged pupils were below the national averages for disadvantaged pupils and for other pupils at both key stages 2 and 4.

- Inspection of trust schools since September 2016 found increasingly strong progress, particularly in English and mathematics, and often from starting points which are typically low. Where underperformance existed in the past, standards are rising because of improvements in teaching. The trust's provisional outcomes for 2017 indicate that pupils made more rapid progress in key stage 2 than the previous year. Differences between the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and others with the same starting points are diminishing. However, trust leaders are aware there is more to do to raise attainment further, including for disadvantaged pupils.
- The chief executive and her senior team recognise that, while trustees are well-informed about plans for growth and financial matters, the full board of trustees has had less detailed information on the performance of schools within the trust.
- During 2016, schools reported information about pupil performance in a variety of ways. This reduced the consistency in the evaluation of the trust's key performance indicators about achievement. Information about the progress of pupils in the trust's schools is shared with the trustees' standards committee, but the full board's understanding is limited. The director of standards and effectiveness introduced a common data-tracking system in March, which is now being used to provide a consistent system for gathering information about pupils' achievement across the trust.
- Trust officers are ambitious and recognise that outcomes for all pupils need to improve further. They are working with trustees to develop a new strategic plan to reflect the trust's current position and update the pupil performance accountability measures. Leaders plan to include more measurable outcomes against which the board can hold trust officers and school leaders more robustly to account for the impact of their collective work on pupils' progress, including that for disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils, where the size of these groups is meaningful.
- As schools in the trust improve, there is greater capacity for school-to-school support. Some is already underway, such as the deployment of capable leaders to schools which need extra support. A 'register of excellence' has recently been compiled. It identifies the best practice in particular aspects across the trust's schools. Academy improvement partners and headteachers intend to draw on this to supplement the support provided by specialists from the university's Institute of Education and other local providers.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding has a high priority across the trust. All published inspection reports confirm that arrangements for child protection are effective. The human resources manager provides clear, up-to-date guidance for all schools on staff recruitment processes, including interview practice and the vetting of staff and volunteers. She carries out rigorous checks to confirm that these processes are followed. She also ensures that all staff, including volunteers, have received appropriate training in child protection. The trust makes available to schools the considerable expertise the university has in health and safety. The estates lead from the university carries out an annual premises check and presides over the construction of an estates plan for each school.

Recommendations

To ensure that the improvements achieved to date can be sustained over time, trust officers should:

- ensure that outcomes across the trust improve further, including for disadvantaged pupils and the most able, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, where the size of these groups is meaningful
- provide sharper and more consistent reporting to the board of trustees about the achievement of pupils in the trust's schools, to enable more robust challenge
- promote improvement in pupils' outcomes across the wider curriculum, by exploring how schools can access specialist support, including from the university
- implement plans to strengthen school-to-school support by sharing best practice and increasing the deployment of the strongest practitioners in trust schools to provide support for colleagues in other schools.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of the Trust

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

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Inspection grade, July 2017
Berewood Primary School	Hampshire	September 2014	Not previously inspected	Good
Kingsham Primary School	West Sussex	September 2014	Not previously inspected	Requires improvement
Fernhurst Primary School	West Sussex	September 2014	November 2013 Requires improvement	Good

School inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 8 monitoring inspection

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Monitoring inspection history
Frogmore Junior School	Hampshire	September 2013	June 2016 Requires improvement	July 2017: taking effective action

Other schools

School	Local authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection grade since becoming an academy
Mill Chase Academy	Hampshire	November 2013	Not previously inspected	October 2016 Good
The Flying Bull Academy	Portsmouth	April 2014	November 2013 Good	February 2017 Good (short inspection)
Court Lane	Portsmouth	September	November 2013	Not yet

Infant School		2016	Good	inspected
Court Lane Junior School	Portsmouth	September 2016	October 2014 Good	Not yet inspected
Arundel Court Primary Academy and Nursery	Portsmouth	May 2017	July 2015 Good	Not yet inspected
Highbury Primary School	Portsmouth	July 2017	November 2012 Good	Not yet inspected