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Mr John Mannix
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Dear Mr Mannix

Focused review of Plymouth CAST

Following the focused review of 10 Plymouth CAST (the Trust) schools and the subsequent follow-up visit 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 review findings.

Thank you for your cooperation and that of all those who we met during the visit on 19 and 20 October 2016. Inspectors greatly appreciated the time and care taken to prepare the programme of meetings for them. Please convey our thanks to all those who gave up their time to meet with inspectors.

Focused inspections of 10 of the Trust's schools were carried out during the week of 10 October 2016.

The Trust, which is responsible for 36 schools, was selected for a focused review because of Ofsted's concerns about the performance of a number of its schools. The findings from the sample of focused inspections and a wider consideration of the Trust's overall performance are set out below.

Summary of main findings

- The Trust is failing to provide effective challenge and support for school improvement.
- The chief executive officer (CEO) and directors of the Trust board do not have a sufficient understanding of school performance. Membership of the Trust has not led to higher standards of achievement in too many of its schools.
- Some schools have seen a significant decline in their performance since they joined the Trust. Six of the 10 schools inspected in October 2016 were judged to require improvement or to be inadequate.

- Trust leaders do not have the capacity to bring about improvement with the necessary urgency. They have been too slow to recognise and tackle weaknesses in the quality of provision. They have not intervened quickly enough to secure or maintain the quality of teaching and leadership required for pupils to achieve well.
- Leaders do not routinely monitor and analyse patterns and trends in pupils' achievement. Consequently, their actions are too often ad hoc and piecemeal, which results in patchy implementation and limited impact in improving pupils' achievement.
- In 2015, overall pupil progress between key stages 1 and 2 was below average in two thirds of the primary schools in the Trust. Provisional results based on 2016 national tests show that 21 of the Trust's 32 primary schools did not achieve a positive progress measure for writing. Similarly, in mathematics, 23 of the Trust's primary schools did not achieve a positive progress score.
- Trust leaders and board members do not have a clear strategy to tackle the underachievement of disadvantaged pupils. They cannot account for the impact of the £2 million of additional funding which the Trust received for these pupils in 2016.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, vary too widely from school to school. These groups of pupils do not do well enough.
- The Trust does not meet the statutory requirement to publish its scheme of delegation on its website and for all schools to have a copy of the scheme on their own websites.
- The scheme of delegation is not fit for purpose. Lines of accountability within governance and leadership are blurred. It is unclear who is accountable for improving the performance of individual schools and the Trust as a whole.
- Until very recently there was no overarching strategy for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures in the Trust's schools. Some schools have been slow to comply with the Trust's recently introduced safeguarding checks.

Evidence

Focused inspections of 10 of the Trust's schools were carried out between 11 and 13 October 2016. Three of these inspections were carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended). Four short inspections of schools previously judged to be good were carried out as monitoring visits under section 8 of the Act. Two inspections were of schools previously judged to be outstanding. One inspection was a safeguarding inspection to follow up an inspection in June 2016 where safeguarding at the school was judged to be ineffective.

The outcomes of the section 5 focused inspections of the three schools previously judged to require improvement before joining the Trust were that:

- two schools were judged to be good

- one school was judged to require special measures.

The outcomes of the section 8 short inspections of the four schools previously judged to be good before joining the Trust were that:

- one short inspection converted to a section 5 inspection and the school was judged to remain good
- two short inspections converted to section 5 inspections and the schools were judged to require improvement
- one short inspection converted to a section 5 inspection and the school was judged to require special measures.

The outcomes of the inspections of the two schools that were outstanding prior to joining the Trust were that:

- one school now requires improvement
- one school now requires special measures.

The outcome of the no formal designation safeguarding inspection was that safeguarding was now judged to be effective, having previously been judged to be ineffective in June 2016.

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) held telephone discussions with the headteachers of 17 other schools in the Trust between 13 and 18 October 2016. During the follow-up visit to the Trust, HMI held discussions with the CEO, the three area advisers and eight members of the Trust board, including three headteacher members. Discussions were held with four governors from schools that were not involved in the focused inspections. A telephone discussion was held with one of the Trust's main external partners. HMI also scrutinised a range of trust documentation including strategic plans, case studies from individual schools, outcomes data and minutes of meetings, information about partnership working and financial information.

Context

Plymouth CAST became a single multi-academy trust when 34 schools converted to academy status in April 2014. The Trust is a charity, with directors appointed by the Catholic Bishop of Plymouth. It operates as the single employer for all its schools. The Trust is now responsible for 36 providers across seven local authorities in the south west region: one nursery; one first school; 32 primary schools and two secondary schools. Schools are organised into three distinct areas known as Central, East and West. Each area is supported by an area adviser.

Main findings

During this review, 10 of the Trust's schools were inspected. One other school has been inspected since the Trust was established in April 2014. Over half of these

schools are not providing a good quality of education. Common weaknesses identified by these inspections were:

- ineffective monitoring and evaluation of performance by school leaders
- weak leadership at middle and senior levels to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes
- low expectations of what pupils can achieve
- teachers' weak subject knowledge and poor use of assessment information
- underachievement of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged
- wide variation in the quality of support for and achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- weak governance that is unable to hold school leaders to account
- an over-generous view of individual school performance by Trust leaders, particularly with regard to those schools previously judged to be outstanding.

Membership of the Trust has not led to higher standards of achievement for many of its schools. Poor strategic leadership, weak systems to secure trust-wide improvement and the absence of a clearly articulated vision to secure academic excellence have combined to expose significant weaknesses in the work of Plymouth CAST. Almost a third of the Trust schools have been inspected since April 2014 and over half of these are not providing a good quality of education. The Trust's own analysis of current monitoring records indicates that a number of other schools are showing a decline in performance during their time with the Trust.

Trust leaders and board directors do not have the capacity to support school improvement. They have been too slow to establish a trust-wide strategy of improvement either to maintain previous good performance or to halt entrenched underachievement. The CEO and board of directors do not know how well different groups of pupils are performing across the Trust. They do not have a clear understanding about the quality of leadership in schools and do not check fully what impact this is having on outcomes for pupils. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able pupils are simply not good enough.

The overall value-added score at key stage 2 in 2015 was below average, with nearly a quarter of the Trust's primary schools having a score significantly below the national level. In 2016, two thirds of Plymouth CAST's primary schools had a negative progress score in writing and mathematics using the government's new performance measure. Attainment and progress of pupils in the Trust's two secondary schools showed similar patterns of underachievement in 2015. Only 45% of secondary pupils achieved five GCSEs grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, and just over half of all pupils made the progress expected from their starting points.

The Trust's strategic plan does not prioritise or address unequivocally the urgent need to improve outcomes for pupils in too many of its schools. A standardised

approach to school improvement planning, introduced in September 2016, makes no reference to monitoring the performance of key groups of pupils such as the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Trust leaders do not analyse patterns of achievement for these and other groups across their schools and are therefore unable to evaluate their performance with any degree of accuracy. Such weaknesses in leadership stymie the development of a coordinated approach to tackle underachievement at its root cause.

Across the Trust, too few of the most able pupils get the quality of teaching they need to achieve the high standards that they are capable of and prepare them fully for the next stage in education, training or employment. Low expectations of what pupils can achieve was identified as a common feature in eight of the 10 schools inspected as part of the focused review in October 2016. In 2015, nearly 40% of previously high attaining pupils at key stage 2 did not make the progress expected to achieve a grade B or above in English at GCSE. In mathematics, the figure for this group was 45%. In 2016, only around half of pupils with high prior attainment at key stage 1 reached the higher standard in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. In writing, the figure was around one quarter.

For too many disadvantaged pupils who attend a Plymouth CAST school, the Trust is failing in its mission to enable 'children of all abilities and backgrounds to flourish'. Trust leaders do not have a clear strategy to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Last year, the Trust received over £2 million of additional funding to support these pupils across its schools. The CEO, the Trust board and the Trust's area advisers cannot explain how this funding has been used and what difference it has made to improve the achievement of these pupils. The answer is, not nearly enough.

Primary and secondary disadvantaged pupils do not progress as well as other pupils nationally. In 2015, less than two thirds of pupils reached the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2. In 2016, only one third of disadvantaged pupils reached the standard expected by the end of Year 6. This poor performance was replicated at key stage 4 where, in 2015, only one in four disadvantaged boys and one in three disadvantaged girls gained a good pass in English and mathematics at GCSE. Unvalidated results for 2016 show that this underperformance continued unabated.

Weak leadership and governance at the top of the Trust's management structure is hampering its ability to bring about the rapid change required. Systems and procedures to support school improvement, which were lacking when the Trust was established, remain in their infancy now, nearly three years later. A number of headteachers who spoke to inspectors did not know the key priorities of the Trust. Neither the CEO nor members of the Trust board could articulate clearly who is accountable for improving school performance. Confusion reigns about who is responsible for what across the Trust. Trust leaders have been too slow to take action when concerns are identified and do not know what difference any interventions to secure improvement are making. For example, a new 'educational impact committee' which was set up in April 2016 to better target poor performance

and effect more rapid improvement, is yet to convene. Such inertia is indicative of the Trust's limited leadership capacity and its inability and lack of urgency to make things better.

The quality of governance both at Trust level and individual school level is weak. Weaknesses in governance contribute to the poor quality of education being provided in too many of the Trust's schools. For example, too many school governors do not fully understand the role of the Trust's area adviser in the accountability structure or their own role in holding schools to account to secure the best possible outcomes for pupils. Governance was identified as an area for development in seven of the 10 inspections that took place before the focused review.

School leaders are unclear about the lines of accountability that exist within the Trust. The scheme of delegation, which outlines the functions of governance for the Trust and its schools, is not fit for purpose, nor is it well known or well understood. The Department for Education expects that all multi-academy trusts and their schools must publish a copy of the scheme of delegation on their website. However, a copy only appeared on the Trust's own website and on the websites of many of the individual schools as a direct result of requests from the lead inspectors when setting up their inspections.

The small team of Trust area advisers do not have the capacity to work effectively with other schools beyond those that have the greatest need for intervention. Significant unsettled or turbulent leadership in some of the Trust's weakest schools has meant that area advisers have needed to provide them with additional support. At times, this has been to the detriment of other schools within the Trust. Records of visits by area advisers are ad hoc and some schools have not received copies. Consequently, some headteachers do not know what the Trust's evaluation is of their school's effectiveness.

Trust leaders have an over-generous view of school performance. Processes to monitor and evaluate school performance lack coherence and rigour. Area advisers and the CEO do not routinely analyse and question Trust-wide patterns and trends in the performance of groups to inform their work. The findings from monitoring are not routinely presented to board members. This hinders their ability to precisely target where improvement is required and hold Trust leaders to account for it. Planned actions to improve school performance are not evaluated thoroughly to identify what impact they are having, where things are working and what needs to change. Consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement remains too variable in many of the Trust's schools.

The lack of recruitment and development of enough headteachers and senior leaders with the requisite expertise to lead the rapid 'root and branch' change that some of the Trust schools need is a significant barrier to improvement. Trust leaders have not addressed this issue quickly enough and are only now putting together a strategy to develop a more sustainable model of leadership and 'grow their own' future leaders in schools.

Where strong school leadership exists within the Trust there is often a marked difference in performance. For example, collaboration between primary schools and work by primary headteachers and the area adviser in the West region is improving the performance of pupils in mathematics. In 2016, the progress of primary aged pupils in mathematics has compared favourably with the other Trust regions as has the proportion of pupils who attain the higher standard. In contrast, only one school in the East region has a positive progress measure for mathematics in 2016 and four others have been significantly below the national average.

Safeguarding

Trust leaders and board members do not have rigorous enough systems in place to know that all schools meet their statutory duties for safeguarding children. In the past, where safeguarding concerns have been identified, the Trust has been too slow to take action. For example, an emergency safeguarding inspection of one of the Trust's schools in June 2016 found safeguarding to be wholly ineffective. Concerns about safeguarding in the school had been brought to the Trust's attention on a number of occasions over the previous 12 months, but it was not until the inspection findings were made known that the Trust finally took the appropriate action. Since then, the newly appointed area adviser has done much good work with the new headteacher to ensure that safeguarding is now effective in the school. However, this successful approach to develop the quality of safeguarding is not replicated at the highest level of leadership in the Trust.

In July 2016, a Trust board member was appointed to oversee safeguarding arrangements across the Trust and an immediate review of safeguarding across all Trust schools was implemented. Despite these steps, three schools did not complete the safeguarding review and the Trust has not followed this up with the necessary diligence. During our focused review, the CEO and the Trust board could not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that safeguarding arrangements were rigorously monitored or that they knew whether such arrangements were robustly applied in all Trust schools.

Recommendations

- Urgently address identified weaknesses in provision, particularly in schools that are not yet good.
- Ensure that all forms of support, development and challenge from Trust leaders focus on improved achievement for disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve governance at all levels so that Trust and school leaders are held to account for the performance of pupils.
- Establish clear lines of accountability and clarify roles and responsibilities of Trust leaders and the board, so that all know what part they play in improving school performance.

- Ensure that Trust leaders, including the board, monitor safeguarding rigorously across all schools.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons
Regional Director, South West

Annex: Academies that are part of Plymouth CAST

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

School name	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Inspection grade October 2016
St. John's Catholic Primary School, Camborne	Cornwall	April 2014	Good
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School	Plymouth	April 2014	Good
Priory Roman Catholic School, Torquay	Torbay	April 2014	Inadequate

Schools inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 8 short inspection

School name	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Inspection grade October 2016
Keyham Barton Catholic Primary School	Plymouth	April 2014	Requires improvement
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Exmouth	Devon	April 2014	Requires improvement
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Buckfast	Devon	April 2014	Good
Queensway Catholic Primary School	Torbay	April 2014	Inadequate

Schools inspected as part of the focused inspection – exempt school inspections

School name	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Inspection grade October 2016
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Poole	Poole	April 2014	Requires improvement
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Penzance	Cornwall	April 2014	Inadequate

Schools inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 8 no formal designation inspection

School name	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement and date	Inspection grade October 2016
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School	Devon	April 2014	Safeguarding is not effective June 2016	Safeguarding is effective

Other CAST schools

Primary schools

School name	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Axminster	Devon	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Catherine's Roman Catholic School, Bridport	Dorset	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Christ the King Catholic Primary School	Bournemouth	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Marnhull	Dorset	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Poole	Poole	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Swanage	Dorset	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Augustine's Catholic Primary School, Weymouth	Dorset	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Mary's Catholic First School, Dorchester	Dorset	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Wimborne	Dorset	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Mary and St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School	Dorset	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy

St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bodmin	Cornwall	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Falmouth	Cornwall	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Holy Cross Catholic Primary School	Plymouth	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
The Cathedral School of St Mary	Plymouth	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Paul's Roman Catholic Primary School	Plymouth	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St Peter's RC Primary School	Plymouth	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Our Lady's Catholic Primary School, Barnstaple	Devon	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School	Torbay	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Primary School, Dartmouth	Devon	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. Nicholas Catholic Primary School	Devon	June 2013	Good February 2015
Sacred Heart Catholic School	Torbay	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Our Lady and St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Primary School	Devon	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
St. John's Catholic Primary School	Devon	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy

Secondary schools

School name	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
St. Boniface RC College	Plymouth	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Notre Dame Roman Catholic School	Plymouth	April 2014	Not yet inspected as an academy

Early years provision

School name	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
The Orchard Nursery	Bournemouth	April 2014	Outstanding March 2016