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Dear Dr Blunden

Summary evaluation of Truro and Penwith Academy Trust

Following the summary evaluation of Truro and Penwith Academy Trust ('the Trust') in January 2019, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the Trust on 14 to 17 January 2019. Inspectors greatly appreciated the time and care taken to prepare the programme of meetings and school visits for them. Please convey our thanks to all those who kindly gave up their time to meet with the inspectors.

The Trust, which consists of 25 schools, was selected for a summary evaluation visit because a high number of its constituent schools are performing well.

The findings from the summary evaluation and a wider consideration of the Trust's overall performance are set out below.

Summary of main findings

- The chief executive officer (CEO) provides inspirational and dedicated strategic leadership. She has led the Trust's growth with uncompromising adherence to the Trust's mission to 'retain each school's distinctiveness within its local community'.
- Trustees provide a clear vision which guides decision-making at all levels in the Trust. They keep an unwavering focus on achieving their key strategic priority, 'to improve the life chances of all children and young people in our schools'. There is no place for 'quick fixes' in this Trust. Its work is firmly grounded in sustainable improvement.

- The director of education is highly regarded. Her work has strengthened the rigour of systems to develop leadership capacity, staff subject knowledge and teaching expertise, particularly in the primary schools.
- The Trust continually challenges its leaders and staff at all levels to improve educational standards. As the Trust has grown, leaders have made well-considered changes to its systems and structures, so that clear lines of accountability remain. This means that all staff know and understand the part they play in improving the educational outcomes of pupils in the Trust.
- Trust leaders have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each constituent school and use this to focus improvement activity. Leaders are keen to allow schools to preserve their individual distinctiveness and to innovate. They do not insist on uniformity across the Trust.
- Leaders have put a clear performance management strategy in place to support staff development at all levels. The strong underpinning culture of respect for school leaders ensures that they engage positively with all the Trust's activities. School leaders describe the Trust's leadership as 'challenge without fear'.
- The Trust is one that schools want to join. Local governing body representatives reported that they chose to join the Trust because they identify strongly with its vision. They value the high-quality support within the Trust, which consolidates what is strong and strengthens any weaknesses.
- The Trust's human resources, finance and estate management functions are very effective. Trust officers' close support for individual schools ensures that school leaders' sharp focus on school improvement does not waver.
- The Trust's ethos reflects a strong commitment to collaboration and cooperation between and beyond its constituent schools. This develops capacity and expertise across the Trust at all levels. On a day-to-day basis headteachers feel supported and empowered.
- Although improving across individual schools, the attendance of pupils across the Trust remains a challenge, mainly due to holidays in term-time.
- Where Trust leaders have provided support to schools to ensure that disadvantaged pupils do not fall behind, outcomes have improved. However, this strong practice has yet to impact on disadvantaged pupils across the Trust.

Evidence

Inspections of six schools within the Trust were carried out between 2 October 2018 and 10 December 2018. All these inspections were carried out under either section 5 or 8 of the Education Act 2005 (the Act), as amended.

The inspection outcomes were:

- all five schools that received a section 8 inspection remained good
- one school received a section 5 inspection and was judged to require improvement, having previously been good.

During the visit to the Trust, discussions were held with you, the director of education and other senior staff from the Trust. In addition, HMI visited 10 schools and held discussions with senior leaders and teaching staff representing every school within the Trust. HMI met with members, trustees and representatives from local governing bodies. HMI also scrutinised a range of relevant Trust documentation, including strategic plans, case studies from individual schools, pupils' achievement information, minutes of meetings, information about partnership working, and safeguarding information.

Context

Truro and Penwith Academy Trust has 25 schools in Cornwall with over 5,000 pupils. The Trust consists of 22 primary schools and three secondary. Twenty-one of the schools are academy converters. The other four schools are sponsor-led academies.

The Trust was established in 2014. St Ives School and Pendeen School were the first sponsor-led academies to join in April 2014, followed by St Dennis Primary Academy in September 2014. The Trust has gradually expanded over time, with three converter academies joining in 2015, seven in 2016, seven in 2017, three in June 2018 and a further two in September 2018.

The founding sponsor for the Trust is Truro and Penwith College. This general further education college was judged outstanding at its most recent Ofsted inspection in February 2016.

Three of the seven primary schools that joined in 2017 were re-brokered into the Trust from Penlee Academy Trust.

The Trust has a partnership with Cornwall Teaching School. The teaching school works closely with Cornwall School Centred Initial Teacher Training, which was judged outstanding at its most recent inspection in 2015.

The Trust's schools are grouped together in three hubs across Cornwall, centred on college bases in Bodmin, Penwith and Truro.

The primary schools vary in size from around 70 pupils (Cardinham School) to around 420 pupils (Threemilestone School). The secondary schools are all much smaller than the national average, ranging from around 310 pupils in Cape Cornwall School to around 540 pupils in each of the other two secondary schools.

The Trust has sponsored four schools that were previously inadequate. Three of the four schools have since been inspected. All three have made rapid improvement and are now good schools. Of the other 13 schools inspected since joining the Trust, one has declined from good to requires improvement and 12 have remained good.

Across the Trust, a quarter of pupils are disadvantaged, which is in line with the national average. Nine of the schools in the Trust have very high levels of deprivation compared to the national average.

Main findings

- As the Trust has expanded, trustees and the CEO have maintained their commitment to allowing its constituent schools to express their individual identity, while establishing rigorous lines of accountability. The rich and customised curriculum has been a common strength identified in recent inspection visits to the Trust's schools.
- Trustees are effective at a strategic level. Their vision guides decision-making. Strategic development planning by the Trust is strong. Trustees' planned actions address key priorities.
- The Trust has successfully embedded a culture of high expectations and engagement of leaders in school improvement activities. As a result, the Trust has become self-sustaining and self-improving. Trust leaders have been successful in recruiting and deploying strong leaders to key posts across the Trust. Leaders have established highly effective procedures to manage the performance of staff. This enables them to identify strengths and potential, as well as providing strong challenge for any underperformance. Local governing body and parent representatives praise the Trust's work in securing stability and providing a smooth transition in the interim period after one headteacher leaves and another joins a school.
- The director of education has had a significant impact on the development of leadership and teaching across the Trust's schools. This is particularly the case in the primary schools that make up the greater part of the Trust. Notably, the director of education has raised the profile of the early years across the Trust in recognition of the need for more children to be better prepared for Year 1. Currently, the number of children reaching a good level of development, the expected standard by the end of the Reception Year, is below the national average.
- The Trust draws effectively on expertise from both the Cornwall Teaching School and Truro and Penwith College. These partnerships develop subject expertise and pedagogy well. They provide effective staff development, leading to improved outcomes and sustainable leadership across the Trust.

- The Trust manages talent effectively and its involvement in national leadership programmes such as the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership and National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership supports a growth in expertise and professional dialogue across the Trust.
- A layered system of leadership ensures a consistent focus on Trust improvement. The Trust focuses its improvement activities on a precise analysis of constituent schools. The School and Headteacher Improvement Programme involves triads of schools working together. The Trust has also established hub focus groups. Within each group, a primary executive leader focuses on improvement activity. As a result, the Trust has established a highly effective system of self-improvement that responds quickly to its developing needs.
- Virtually all constituent schools were judged good at their most recent inspection. However, the Trust has identified that a few schools do not understand their part in the Trust's culture of high expectations. Where this is the case, leaders have developed a coherent intervention strategy and are making close checks on the school's progress. School leaders welcome this rigour and willingly engage with the Trust's guidance and intervention.
- The carefully focused improvement interventions empower school leaders to drive forward standards. The Trust risk-assesses each school to determine the level of intervention. All schools receive a comprehensive 'core' package of help and analysis. 'Additional' and 'targeted' packages provide more intense intervention and scrutiny.
- For example, several schools have received additional and targeted intervention for mathematics. Engagement in the 'CODE Maths Hub', one of the national hubs supporting Cornwall and West Devon (led by a headteacher from within the Trust), has resulted in much-improved attainment at the higher standard in mathematics. Across the Trust, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 in schools receiving targeted support rose by 6% in 2018. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard increased by the same amount, so that more pupils are reaching the higher standard in mathematics than others nationally.
- Leaders have used partnership work between schools to raise standards in the early years. For example, a recent project aimed at increasing children's vocabulary has led to much-improved communication and language skills. Children, often from low starting points, make strong progress in understanding and speaking, so that by the time they leave the Reception Year, they are well prepared for Year 1 in these aspects. Similarly, more children in the early years can read and understand simple sentences and can use their phonics knowledge to decode regular words.

- The Trust has successfully improved outcomes in its constituent secondary schools. The strength of each school correlates to the length of time that it has been part of the Trust. Trust leaders have made good use of its most effective senior leaders to work across its secondary phase. However, because the number of constituent secondary schools is small, the peer-led support available to them is more limited than that available to the constituent primary schools.
- Trust leaders keep abreast of national initiatives to learn from good practice in secondary education. The CEO has deployed a useful combination of external and internal support. As a result of its approach, the Trust is now beginning to see improvements. Nonetheless, Trust leaders acknowledge that the Trust's school improvement strategy is less well developed and embedded in secondary schools than in primary schools.
- As the Trust has grown, so have the systems for collecting and interpreting information about pupils' achievement and attendance. Leaders identify that the current systems need further strengthening to securely evaluate the achievement of pupils across the Trust. For example, leaders' actions make a difference to the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities across the Trust.
- One quarter of pupils in the Trust are eligible for pupil premium funding. The Trust has identified the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils as an area for development. The attainment and progress of groups of these pupils are variable. Small cohorts and differences in the length of time schools have been part of the Trust make meaningful national comparisons difficult. However, where schools have received intensive support to remove barriers to learning, more disadvantaged pupils in 2018 have achieved the expected standard at the end of Year 6 and have made stronger progress.
- Leaders have been effective in ensuring that attendance improves in those schools where it was not previously good enough. They have devised a well-considered process for tackling this issue. They have also ensured that schools have good access to education welfare officers. Trust leaders also provide school leaders with case studies of good practice. School leaders are then challenged to choose the approach that best reflects their school's circumstances. There has been a reduction in pupils' absence overall. This is reflected in above-average attendance across the Trust's primary schools overall and an improving picture in the secondary schools.

Safeguarding

The Trust's oversight of safeguarding is effective. The Trust's lead for safeguarding is reflective, well informed and has up-to-date knowledge. Her strong links with Cornwall local authority mean that the Trust stays abreast of local and national initiatives and there is a consistency of approach across schools. Trust leaders make

thorough checks to ensure that governors are following the written guidance and training to monitor the quality of safeguarding in their schools.

Trustees regularly discuss safeguarding. This enables them to understand recent developments and recent government guidance, as well as being informed of ongoing risk. The Trust board analyses information from safeguarding audits, including any trends or areas of concern across the Trust. These audits have triggered additional Trust intervention or support from the headteacher lead.

Headteachers are offered support on individual cases when the need arises. This is important, as the context of schools and the experience of headteachers in dealing with complex safeguarding issues vary across the Trust. Leaders have developed a culture of sharing effective safeguarding practice across the Trust, including through trust-wide training.

The estates manager implements thorough processes to monitor the condition of buildings and the appropriateness and safety of learning environments. Trustees direct funds quickly and efficiently in response to the checks carried out. Evidence seen shows that school sites are safer and better maintained than previously.

Recommendations

- Ensure that strategies designed to overcome disadvantaged pupils' barriers to learning are more effective in helping them to make better progress, building on best practice across the Trust.
- Further embed the Trust's school improvement strategies for the secondary phase and so quicken the rate of improvement.
- Build upon current work to support children's development in the early years, so that, across the Trust, more are well prepared for Year 1.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons HMI
Regional Director, South West

Annex: Academies that are part of the Trust

Schools inspected as part of the batched inspections – section 8 inspections

School	Date opened as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
Perranporth Community Primary School	January 2016	Good 4 December 2018
Chacewater Community Primary School	May 2016	Good 6 November 2018
Threemilestone School	May 2016	Good 6 November 2018
St Erth Community Primary School	July 2016	Good 2 October 2018
Nanledra School	August 2016	Good 20 November 2018

Schools inspected as part of the batched inspections – section 8 inspections that were also deemed to be section 5 inspections

School	Date opened as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
Roche Community Primary School	July 2016	Requires improvement 17 October 2018

Other schools

Primary

School	Date opened as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
Pendeen School	April 2014	Good March 2017
St Dennis Primary Academy	September 2014	Good July 2017
Pensans Primary School	September 2015	Good April 2018

School	Date opened as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
Alverton Primary School	September 2015	Good October 2018
Newlyn School	September 2015	Good November 2017
Mithian School	September 2015	Good July 2018
Blackwater Community Primary School	September 2015	Good February 2018
St Just Primary School	November 2015	Good March 2018
Kehelland Village School	January 2016	Good February 2018
Kennall Vale School	January 2017	Not yet inspected as an academy
Sennen Community Primary Academy	September 2017	Not yet inspected as an academy
Mousehole Community Primary School	November 2017	Not yet inspected as an academy
Berrycoombe School	June 2018	Not yet inspected as an academy
Cardinham School	June 2018	Not yet inspected as an academy
Lanivet Community Primary School	June 2018	Not yet inspected as an academy
Bodriggy Academy	September 2018	Not yet inspected as an academy

Secondary

School	Date opened as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
St Ives School	April 2014	Good January 2017
Hayle Academy	November 2017	Not yet inspected as an academy

School	Date opened as an academy	Most recent inspection judgement and date
Cape Cornwall	September 2018	Not yet inspected as an academy