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26 February 2019

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Dear Mrs Davey

Summary evaluation of Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust

Following the summary evaluation of Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST) in January 2019, when I was accompanied by Matthew Haynes, Senior Her Majesty's Inspector, and Catherine Old, 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.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the trust for stage two of the summary evaluation, which took place on 8–11 January 2019. Please also pass on our sincere thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

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

Summary of main findings

- ODST's values and vision are clear, explicit and shared across the trust. School leaders and governors were involved in shaping these values and feel strong ownership of them. Schools, including the four schools that were previously community schools, are committed to these values.
- Headteachers typically describe ODST as 'a listening trust' and as having a 'personal touch'. Headteachers and governors strongly support the trust's commitment to preserving schools' individual characters and places in their local communities.
- Ofsted reports from the schools inspected during stage one of this summary evaluation noted that leadership and teaching were effective. Outcomes in

early years, phonics and key stage 1 were highlighted as particular areas of strength. The curriculum was judged to be broad, balanced and appropriately challenging. Inspectors also commented positively on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and behaviour. In all schools, inspectors found there to be a strong culture of safeguarding. Reports consistently praised the positive impact of support from the trust on school improvement.

- Inspectors also highlighted those areas which leaders and governors should focus on in order to bring about further improvement. Recommendations included: improving pupils' progress in writing and mathematics; providing more training for governors so that they are better able to hold leaders to account; and continuing to develop subject leadership. Trustees and officers have taken effective action to support schools in addressing these recommendations.
- Overall outcomes for pupils are in line with national averages in the early years and in phonics. Pupils' attainment at key stage 1 has risen over time and, in 2018, was above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. At key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has also risen steadily over the last three years, so that it is now broadly in line with the national average at both the expected and higher standards. However, pupils' progress in key stage 2 has been variable over time, particularly in mathematics.
- The chair of the trust works closely with the chief executive officer (CEO) and both are well known to trust schools. Trustees are improving their visibility across ODST. While trustees' work is largely effective, their understanding of the impact of school improvement work, particularly in terms of pupils' achievement by the end of key stage 2, is not yet sharply focused enough.
- The trust's scheme of delegation provides clear guidance to local governing bodies (LGBs). Governors understand their responsibilities and carry them out diligently. They are very well supported by the trust's governor services team. However, the level of challenge that governors provide to headteachers regarding pupils' outcomes is not consistently strong across the trust.
- School leaders greatly value the termly visits from the trust's school improvement advisers (SIAs). ODST has made a significant investment in an appropriately qualified and experienced SIA team that has won the respect and trust of school leaders and governors. School leaders report that SIAs challenge and develop leaders' thinking and build capacity for the future. However, in those schools where, over time, pupils have made below-average progress during key stage 2, SIA visits have not had a sufficiently sharp focus or sustained impact on improving pupils' outcomes.
- Central staff know schools well and are highly visible in the trust. School leaders receive prompt and accurate advice from the finance, human resources (HR), estates and operations teams.

- School leaders rate the training provided by the trust highly. Typically, they say that the training that they and their staff have benefited from would otherwise have been out of their reach. Many leaders describe the recent middle leader development programme as particularly important and useful.
- Through the recently formed regional hubs, opportunities for schools and teachers to collaborate are growing. Although the five hubs are at different stages of development, school leaders are positive about the impact they are beginning to have.
- Communication at all levels is a strength of the trust, for example through regular leadership conferences, briefings and business meetings. School leaders and governors also serve on various cross-trust committees and working groups. However, headteachers and governors have had little formal involvement in the development of the trust's strategic plan and priorities. While leaders value the opportunities that they have to provide feedback to central officers about the work of the trust, they would welcome the opportunity to have a more direct role in shaping the trust's strategic vision and priorities.

Range of evidence

For stage one of the summary evaluation, inspections of five academies took place between 13 June 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 at stage one of the summary evaluation were as follows:

- The section 5 inspections of John Henry Newman Academy, Datchet St Mary's Church of England Primary School and Burford Primary School resulted in all three schools being judged to be good overall. Two of these schools, John Henry Newman Academy and Datchet St Mary's Church of England Primary School, had previously been judged to require improvement. Burford Primary School remained good.
- In the section 8 short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Controlled Infant School, inspectors judged that the school continues to be good.
- In Wheatley Church of England Primary School's fourth section 8 monitoring inspection, inspectors judged that leaders and governors were taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

During stage 2 of the summary evaluation, inspectors visited 10 schools, meeting with the headteacher, representatives of the LGB and a small group of middle leaders in each one. Telephone discussions were held with the headteachers of 12 further schools. Inspectors met with you and other senior and operational staff from the trust over the course of the week. In addition, I met with a group of trustees, including the chair and vice chair, and with representatives of the Diocese of Oxford, and their Diocesan Board of Education. I also spoke on the telephone to a senior

officer of Oxfordshire County Council. Inspectors scrutinised a range of relevant documentation.

Context

The trust was established in 2012. John Henry Newman Academy was the first school to join, in September 2012. ODST grew gradually at first, with two further schools joining in 2013, five in 2014, eight in 2015 and two in 2016. However, the trust expanded rapidly in 2017, when 11 schools joined, followed by four more in 2018. The most recent school to join ODST was Wootton-By-Woodstock Church of England Primary School in October 2018.

ODST now comprises 33 schools situated across Oxfordshire and Berkshire, made up of one middle-deemed-secondary school, 28 primary schools, one junior school and three infant schools. The middle-deemed-secondary school and three primary schools are sponsor-led academies. The other 29 schools are academy converters. While the majority are Church of England affiliated, four were previously community schools and remain schools with no faith designation.

Wootton-By-Woodstock Church of England Primary School is the smallest school in the trust, with around 40 pupils. St Christopher's Church of England School, Cowley is the largest, with approximately 430 pupils.

The trust operates in five 'hubs' designed to encourage schools to work more closely together. These hubs are: Oxford; West Oxfordshire; Southern Arc; North Oxfordshire; and Thames.

The trust's scheme of delegation devolves significant powers to LGBs. Oversight of the work of LGBs and headteachers is provided by a small central team that includes lead officers for school improvement, finance, HR, operations and estates. The trust board is serviced by committees that cover school improvement, finance, ethos, pay and personnel and estates, including health and safety. A 'nominations' committee is concerned with succession planning for trustees and governors. The Diocesan Board of Education is a corporate member of the trust.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the trust is lower than that seen nationally. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have an education, health and care plan (EHC) is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Inspection outcomes

At their most recent inspections, 88% of schools in the trust were judged to be good or outstanding. Of the eight outstanding schools, two have achieved their outstanding judgements since joining the trust. Twenty-one schools have an overall effectiveness judgement of good. Three schools currently require improvement and one is inadequate.

Of the 14 schools that have received at least one section 5 or section 8 inspection since joining the trust, 78% were judged to be good or better. Six of these schools improved by at least one grade, five schools retained their previous grade of good and three declined by at least one grade.

The performance of pupils in trust schools in national tests

- It is important to bear in mind that 15 schools, almost half the total number, have joined the trust since January 2017. However, some important trends can be discerned by looking at how well children in trust schools have done since 2017.
- In 2017 and 2018, published results showed that the proportion of children in the early years who achieved a good level of development was in line with national averages, including for disadvantaged children.
- The proportion of Year 1 pupils who reached the expected standard in phonics was also similar to the national average in both 2017 and 2018. At key stage 1, pupils' outcomes were in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics at the expected standard. In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above national averages.
- At key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has increased steadily and in 2018 was broadly average both at the expected and higher standards.
- Pupils' progress in writing at key stage 2 in 2018 was broadly similar to that found nationally, having improved from well below average in 2017. In reading, pupils' progress was broadly average in 2017, but fell to below average in 2018. Pupils' progress in mathematics has been well below average for the last two years. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 was well below that of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics in both 2017 and 2018.
- In summary, pupils attain in line with national averages in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. However, the progress that pupils make from their starting points at key stage 2 remains too variable over time, particularly in mathematics.

Main findings

- The trust's 'common vision for the common good' permeates all aspects of ODST's work. School leaders and governors speak of their strong commitment to the trust. Typically, they describe ODST as being 'like a family', in which the CEO and her team display high levels of professionalism balanced with warmth, care and respect for all.
- Over the last year, trustees, officers, governors and headteachers have welcomed the chance to work with the CEO to articulate the vision and values of the trust. Leaders and governors in several schools, including those not

affiliated to the Church of England, said that they chose to join the trust because of the values it espouses and the premium ODST places on retaining schools' individual characters.

- The CEO retains and promotes strong links with the Diocese of Oxford, the Diocesan Board of Education and the two local authorities in which the schools are situated. For example, the diocese provides many advisers for headteachers' performance management, while one local authority is careful to include trust schools in appropriate training events.
- The chair of trustees is a visible and approachable presence in the trust, having visited all 33 schools over the past year. Recent moves to link trustees with the regional hubs are well considered. Trustees drive and oversee the work of the trust through well-organised committees that have clear terms of reference and that are chaired by trustees with the relevant skills and experience. As a result, trustees have a thorough and generally accurate knowledge of schools' strengths and weaknesses. Recently, trustees have rightly requested that officers provide them with clearer and more detailed information about how well pupils in trust schools are doing, particularly in mathematics.
- The board exercises effective oversight of finance, steering the trust skilfully through a challenging economic climate. This is particularly important given the relatively large number of small village schools in the trust. Trustees and officers believe that these schools play a vital role in their communities and are committed to their survival. They are rightly considering ways in which staff and resources can be shared across small schools to ensure they remain financially sustainable.
- Trustees devolve significant responsibilities to LGBs through a clearly written and well-executed scheme of delegation. Appropriate structures of governance are efficient and fit for purpose. Headteachers and governors say that they feel empowered and valued by the level of responsibility that is delegated to them. Governors understand their responsibilities and say that they benefit from helpful training provided by officers of the trust and the Diocese of Oxford. However, while most LGBs focus sharply on the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' outcomes, officers recognise that there is also some variability in the levels of challenge provided to senior leaders by governors.
- The CEO and trustees have recently expanded the central team and made sensible changes to the way the team works to provide stronger oversight of schools' work. For example, there are now closer links between officers responsible for school improvement and health and safety, to ensure that safeguarding continues to have a consistently high priority.
- Trustees have reviewed their committee structure to reflect the changes at officer level to achieve a clearer line of sight to the quality of education provided by schools. For example, standards and curriculum are now scrutinised in a single committee, whereas previously they had been considered in two different committees.

- Leaders and governors report that the support they receive for HR, finance, and health and safety, including safeguarding, estates and governor services, is provided by staff who are credible, knowledgeable and experienced. The work of these officers is well-intentioned and executed efficiently. They are highly regarded by leaders in schools and provide accurate information to the CEO and trustees. The trust provides a wide range of up-to-date policies and procedures for finance, HR, safeguarding and health and safety for schools to adapt. These centralised policies lighten leaders' workload and provide them with reassurance that they are fulfilling statutory requirements.
- Opportunities for school leaders to work together are varied and frequent. Leadership conferences, business meetings and headteacher briefings provide regular opportunities to debate issues and shape onward work. School leaders, including middle leaders, speak very positively about the quality of training offered by the trust, both for themselves and other staff. Recent training on personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education was particularly well received. Headteachers also value the support the trust brokers in for early years, English and mathematics.
- Headteachers receive effective challenge and support in the six annual visits from appropriately qualified and experienced SIAs. Officers use these visits to review progress, set targets, agree support that the school needs and identify any capacity the school may have to support others. Headteachers set great store by the strong and positive relationships they have formed with their SIAs.
- Most of the SIA visits follow themes that are centrally set and at least one of the visits includes an element of peer review. Headteachers appreciate this thematic approach because they say that it supports rigorous self-evaluation. For example, recent improvements in writing in key stage 2 have come about because of a trust-wide focus on writing last year. However, officers agree that the format of the visits, while enabling a sharp focus on specific themes, sometimes lacks the flexibility needed to ensure a strong emphasis on schools' specific needs.
- Officers have been developing a more bespoke approach to school improvement that draws on the resource available in the schools themselves and which, eventually, will provide local accountability for outcomes. Officers have helpfully identified strong schools across the trust that have the leadership capacity to support others. Schools that receive support from these capacity-giving schools have found it to be effective and closely matched to their needs.
- The trust has rightly begun to formalise the ways in which schools' needs are identified and the necessary support put in place to address them. For example, last year, a scheme for awarding 'quality marks' to the trust's most effective middle leaders was put in place. As a result of this, officers have developed a directory of skills which enables headteachers to identify capacity to support subject or phase development.
- As well as providing further capacity to address schools' improvement priorities, the quality marks offer motivating career development opportunities

for middle leaders. Leaders welcome the expectation that they will carry out school-to-school support and embrace the leadership development opportunities that arise from it.

- An important feature of the trust's developing approach to school improvement is the growing and well-received emphasis on collaboration through the five regional hubs. In some cases, work in these hubs is well established; in other cases, it is still developing. Where joint working is more advanced, leaders provide staff with training tailored to locally important issues. Schools also join forces to put on exciting enrichment opportunities for pupils, for example a recent 'big sing' event and a hub-based school council conference. Many schools report that they feel they have more to offer in this regard than is currently being drawn on. The resource, willingness and expertise are in place to develop this area of the trust's work rapidly.
- A key principle of the trust is the freedom given to schools to design a curriculum best suited to the needs of their pupils. The trust has sensibly put in place steps to support schools as they develop their curriculum offer this year. For example, SIA visits for the coming term include a focus on curriculum development and quality, while the regional hubs have begun to create subject networks, initially for English, mathematics and special educational needs provision. These developments provide an opportunity for officers and headteachers to consider together the link between the curriculum and pupils' outcomes, particularly at key stage 2. The existing networks have been instrumental in bringing teachers together, for example to moderate pupils' writing in English. Headteachers point out that efforts to ensure consistency in the moderation of assessment are welcome but not yet embedded across the trust. There are credible plans in place to extend these networks into other curriculum areas.
- Leaders provide feedback to central officers informally through a range of opportunities and say that they feel listened to when they do this. However, there is scope for officers to engage more fully with leaders at a strategic level. To date, headteachers and governors say that they have not had a formal role in developing the strategy or in evaluating its effectiveness and so some report that they do not feel strong ownership of it.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding has a high priority across the trust. Recent changes to officers' responsibilities have ensured an even sharper focus on safeguarding when making decisions centrally. Published Ofsted reports confirm that arrangements for child protection in trust schools are effective and that leaders have successfully established a culture of vigilance in their schools.
- The trust ensures that designated leaders for safeguarding have undertaken appropriate high-level training and that senior leaders and chairs of governors have undertaken training in safer recruitment. The trust's HR lead provides clear, up-to-date guidance for all schools on staff recruitment processes, including interview protocols and the vetting of staff and volunteers.

- Schools are required to upload their safeguarding documents to a central site so that officers can check compliance with current guidelines. SIAs check each school's single central record at least annually. Trustees, who have all undertaken up-to-date safeguarding training, receive and scrutinise summaries of child protection issues at their meetings.

Recommendations

- To ensure that the improvements achieved to date can be sustained over time, trustees and officers should:
 - provide the necessary challenge and support to schools to ensure that pupils across the trust, including those who are disadvantaged, make progress that is in line with or better than national averages at key stage 2
 - sharpen accountability for pupils' outcomes at all levels in the trust by ensuring a more consistent focus on what pupils learn and how well they achieve, including evaluating the impact of school improvement work
 - complement the existing informal approaches to consulting school leaders with more systematic processes for gathering and responding to their feedback and evaluations.

Yours sincerely

Gary Holden
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of the Trust

| URN | School name | Date joined trust | Ofsted phase | Most recent inspection date | OE grade |
|---------------|--|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| 142140 | Bampton Church of England Primary School | 01/07/2015 | Primary | 7/11/2017 (s8 short) | 2 |
| 142645 | Brize Norton Primary School | 01/03/2016 | Primary | 27/02/2013 | 1 |
| 141602 | Burchetts Green Church of England Infants' School | 01/12/2014 | Primary | 03/06/2009 | 1 |
| 142341 | Burford Primary School | 01/10/2015 | Primary | 19/09/2018 | 2 |
| 137788 | Datchet St Mary's Church of England Primary School | 01/01/2017 | Primary | 12/09/2018 | 2 |
| 144530 | Deddington Church of England Primary School | 01/07/2017 | Primary | 06/11/2014 | 2 |
| 144186 | Dr Radcliffe's Church of England Primary School | 01/06/2017 | Primary | 22/03/2007 | 1 |
| 143888 | Dr South's Church of England Primary School | 01/01/2017 | Primary | 24/10/2013 | 2 |
| 145649 | Fir Tree Junior School | 01/04/2018 | Primary | 30/11/2017 | 2 |
| 140474 | Grove Church of England School | 01/12/2013 | Primary | 11/01/2017 | 3 |
| 142846 | Holyport Church of England Primary School | 01/06/2016 | Primary | 17/01/2014 | 3 |
| 138774 | John Henry Newman Academy | 01/09/2012 | Primary | 13/06/2018 | 2 |
| 144577 | Kidmore End Church of England Primary School | 01/08/2017 | Primary | 23/11/2011 | 1 |
| 143986 | Leafield Church of England | 01/02/2017 | Primary | 20/06/2014 | 2 |

| URN | School name | Date joined trust | Ofsted phase | Most recent inspection date | OE grade |
|---------------|---|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | Primary School | | | | |
| 144584 | North Hinksey Church of England Primary School | 01/10/2017 | Primary | 16/01/2014 | 2 |
| 142152 | North Leigh Church of England (Controlled) School | 01/07/2015 | Primary | 27/09/2017(s8 short) | 2 |
| 144688 | Northbourne Church of England Primary School | 01/01/2018 | Primary | 24/06/2015 | 2 |
| 144547 | South Moreton Primary School | 01/06/2017 | Primary | 06/11/2013 | 2 |
| 141816 | St Christopher's Church of England School | 01/03/2015 | Primary | 28/11/2017 (s8 short) | 2 |
| 140556 | St Christopher's Church of England School, Cowley | 01/02/2014 | Primary | 19/01/2017 | 2 |
| 141601 | St Luke's Church of England Primary School | 01/12/2014 | Primary | 12/10/2017 | 1 |
| 142508 | St Mary's Church of England Controlled Infant School | 01/12/2015 | Primary | 10/12/2018 (s8 short) | 2 |
| 144872 | St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Banbury | 01/11/2017 | Primary | 13/10/2016 | 2 |
| 145650 | St Nicholas' Church of England Infants' School and Nursery Class, Wallingford | 01/04/2018 | Primary | 18/01/17 (s8 short) | 2 |
| 141349 | St Peter's Church of England Middle School | 01/11/2014 | Middle deemed secondary | 14/09/2017 | 2 |
| 141833 | St Peter's Church of England School, | 01/03/2015 | Primary | 26/11/2007 | 1 |

| URN | School name | Date joined trust | Ofsted phase | Most recent inspection date | OE grade |
|---------------|---|-------------------|--------------|--|----------|
| | Alvescot | | | | |
| 143889 | Tackley Church of England Primary School | 01/01/2017 | Primary | 12/09/2013 | 2 |
| 142377 | The Batt Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School | 01/10/2015 | Primary | 20/10/2011 | 1 |
| 141840 | The Blake Church of England Primary School | 01/03/2015 | Primary | 07/12/2017 | 3 |
| 140473 | The Hendreds Church of England School | 01/12/2013 | Primary | 02/11/2016 | 1 |
| 140344 | Wheatley Church of England Primary School | 01/03/2014 | Primary | 08/02/2017 (21/11/2018 Special Measures Monitoring Visit 4: Leaders judged to be taking effective action) | 4 |
| 145449 | Wootton-By-Woodstock Church of England Primary School | 01/10/2018 | Primary | 23/04/2015 | 2 |
| 144187 | Wroxton Church of England Primary School | 01/04/2017 | Primary | 02/10/2015 | 2 |