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Mr Ian Comfort
CEO
Academies Enterprise Trust
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Matthew Coffey HMI
Chief Operating Officer

Dear Ian

Inspections of academies within the Academies Enterprise Trust, a Multi-Academy Trust

Louise Soden, Regional Director, East Midlands, asked inspectors to review the impact of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) and its work to improve its academies. Ofsted conducted this work because of concerns about the performance of individual AET academies.

In summary, the concerns in May were that:

- AET academies were not improving quickly enough, with too many continuing to be less than good
- the progress of pupils, as measured by value-added scores, was below the national level between Key Stages 1 and 2 and between Key Stages 2 and 4
- disadvantaged pupils in the Trust were well behind their more affluent peers and less likely to achieve 5 good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, than was the case nationally for all disadvantaged pupils
- with eleven academies judged inadequate, the Trust faced a substantial challenge in raising the performance of its academies. Apart from its central resources, the Trust had only four outstanding academies to draw on for expertise, and three of these are clustered in one corner of the country
- around half of all academies inspected by May 2014 were less than good, a picture that had hardly improved since our December 2013 inspections when six of your academies were judged inadequate.

These concerns suggested that the Trust was not able to give its academies sufficient challenge and support.

Outline of focused inspection activities

Ofsted inspected 12 AET academies in June 2014. In addition, inspectors conducted a telephone survey of a sample of academies to determine whether the Trust provided sufficient support and challenge. The details of the academies inspected and surveyed are set out at Annexes 1 and 2.

Inspection outcomes

Of the 12 academies inspected as part of the focused inspection activity in June 2014:

- one was judged to be inadequate
- five were judged to 'require improvement'
- six were judged to be 'good'
- none was judged to be outstanding.

Only five of the 12 academies inspected had improved since their previous inspection. Half of those inspected continue to be less than good, including one which remains inadequate. One academy declined since its previous inspection.

It remains the case that around half the academies in the Trust are not yet good. As a result, too many pupils in the Trust are not receiving a good enough education.

The inspections highlighted key weaknesses across many of the academies inspected in June. These included:

- teaching that was not good enough to enable all groups of pupils to make sufficient progress
- work that was not matched well enough to pupils' abilities and did not provide sufficient challenge
- low expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
- pupils that lacked good communication and mathematical skills
- pupils that did not understand how to improve their work because marking and feedback were not good
- pupils with less than good attitudes to learning and unacceptable behaviour
- leaders that did not monitor how effectively their work was securing improvement
- governance that did not hold school leaders to account or ensure action was taken to promote improvement.

Overall, there is too much variability across the Trust, with some academies left to flounder. Much of the evidence supports the view expressed by one survey respondent that 'the Trust has grown faster than the capacity of central leadership to manage.'

Academy leader survey outcomes

The survey of academy leaders found that:

- leaders did not know how the Trust intends to ensure that every academy is good or better. Many leaders did not believe that there are enough good academies in the Trust to support the level of improvement required
- some academy leaders felt isolated from the Trust as a whole. They did not believe the Trust played a significant part in the development of their academies
- the Trust has introduced new systems to monitor performance but academy leaders doubted that these would work effectively. They said that data had not been used to identify weaknesses at an early enough stage
- academy leaders did not have confidence in the Trust's ability to provide the support they needed and were seeking help from other sources. Leaders agreed that the support offered by the Trust's consultants was much stronger for English and mathematics than in other subjects and that science support was weak. Academy leaders said that support for improving pupil behaviour and attitudes to learning was not good enough
- leaders did not have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of governors and the Trust's board. Some leaders were concerned that governors and the Trust were not rigorous in holding them to account
- some leaders in primary and special academies felt that the Trust had too strong a secondary focus and that there was insufficient support for their phases of work
- some academy leaders said that there was too much variability in the support and challenge offered by Regional Directors employed by AET.

In summary: strengths and weaknesses

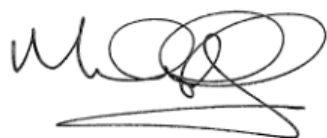
Inspectors have yet to see a profound and consistent impact on the overall performance of academies across the Trust.

The Trust has set up a system for holding academies to account that is regarded as challenging and robust by those leaders who have experienced it. However, this system is not yet in place for all the academies and so its impact is limited.

AET has not provided effective support to all its academies. The rapid expansion of the Trust and a lack of strategic leadership have hindered improvement. Overall, some academy leaders are sceptical that the Trust will be able to help them improve to a good or excellent standard.

I hope this letter will be useful to you in bringing about the required improvement. Ofsted will continue to work with you in providing support and challenge to your academies.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Matthew Coffey", with a horizontal line underneath.

Matthew Coffey HMI
Chief Operating Officer

Annex 1 - Academies inspected between 9 and 20 June 2014

Academy Name	Region	Local Authority	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection grade and date of previous inspection	Inspection grade in June 2014
Greensward Academy	East of England	Essex	01/09/2008	03/03/2011 1	2
The Pioneer School	East of England	Essex	01/06/2012	07/07/2011 2*	2
Nightingale Academy	London	Enfield	01/09/2010	29/01/2013 4	3
Tamworth Enterprise College	West Midlands	Staffordshire	01/09/2012	09/11/2011 3*	3
Percy Shurmer Academy	West Midlands	Birmingham	01/09/2012	17/01/2011 3*	3
Charles Warren Academy	South East	Milton Keynes	01/09/2012	23/11/2009 3*	2
Hall Road Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humberside	Kingston upon Hull	01/09/2012	28/03/2011 3*	2
Newington Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humberside	Kingston upon Hull	01/09/2012	10/6/2010 3*	2
Childwall Sports and Science Academy	North West	Liverpool	01/09/2012	07/12/2011 3*	3
Greenfield Academy	South West	Gloucestershire	01/09/2012	07/03/2012 4*	4

Broadlands Academy	South West	Bath and North East Somerset	01/12/2012	26/01/2010 3*	3
Severn View Academy	South West	Gloucestershire	01/09/2012	07/03/2011 4*	2

*denotes grade awarded to predecessor school

Annex 2 - AET academies which were included in the telephone survey of headteachers carried out in June 2014

Academy Name	Local Authority	Phase	Opening date as an academy	Date of most recent inspection	Inspection grade
Bexleyheath Academy	Bexley	Secondary	01/09/2011	19/09/2013	2
Aylward Academy	Enfield	Secondary	01/09/2010	07/11/2012	2
Four Dwellings Academy	Birmingham	Secondary	01/03/2013	-	-
Shafton Primary Academy	Barnsley	Primary	01/12/2012	04/12/2013	3
St Helen's Primary School	Barnsley	Primary	01/12/2012	11/12/2013	3
Caldicotes Primary Academy	Middlesbrough	Primary	01/04/2013	19/06/2012	2
Eston Park Academy	Redcar and Cleveland	Secondary	01/01/2012	23/05/2013	4
Gillbrook Academy	Redcar and Cleveland	Secondary	01/09/2012	12/12/2013	4
Everest Community Academy	Hampshire	Secondary	01/09/2011	11/07/2013	3
The New Forest Academy	Hampshire	Secondary	01/09/2012	12/12/2013	4
Anglesey Primary Academy	Staffordshire	Primary	01/12/2012	12/12/2013	4
Tendring Technology College	Essex	Secondary	01/08/2011	27/09/2013	1
Maltings Academy	Essex	Secondary	01/09/2008	06/03/2013	3
Clacton Coastal Academy	Essex	Secondary	01/09/2009	05/12/2013	3
Tree Tops Academy	Kent	Primary	01/04/2012	05/12/2013	4

Weston Academy	Isle of Wight	Primary	01/04/2012	03/07/2012	2
North Thoresby Primary School	Lincolnshire	Primary	01/07/2013	29/11/2012	2
Langer Primary Academy	Suffolk	Primary	01/05/2012	30/01/2014	3
Wishmore Cross Academy	Surrey	Special	01/09/2012	31/03/2011*	2

*denotes grade awarded to predecessor school