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Mr Alan Yellup OBE  
Chief Executive Officer  
Wakefield City Academies Trust  
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Dear Mr Yellup

### **Focused inspection of Wakefield City Academies Trust**

Following the focused inspection of a number of Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT) academies and the subsequent follow-up visit to the trust by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) Margaret Farrow and Brian Blake, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

Thank you for your cooperation and that of all the staff whom we met during our visit on 19 and 20 May 2015. We particularly appreciated the time and care taken to prepare the programme for us. Please pass on our thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

### **Evidence**

Five of the trust's academies were inspected in the week prior to this on-site visit. Of these, four were under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, and one, a monitoring inspection, was under section 8 of the same Act. Discussions were held with academy leaders and governors during these inspections. Telephone discussions were also held at the same time with leaders of five other academies within the trust. During this follow-up visit to WCAT, discussions were held with the chief executive officer, senior and operational staff from the trust, headteachers, the chair of the board and partners. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of relevant documentation.

### **Context**

WCAT evolved from Wakefield City High School, which was judged outstanding at each of its last three Ofsted inspections. The high school became an academy in January 2011 and, following this, the Department for Education (DfE) invited it to become an approved academy sponsor. At this time, it also became a teaching school. The academy began supporting weak secondary schools. Wakefield local

authority then asked the academy to sponsor two of its primary schools judged to require special measures following their 2012 Ofsted inspections.

WCAT became a multi-academy trust in August 2013. The trust has grown significantly in the past two years, bringing failing schools into the trust at the request of the DfE or local authorities. It now has academies in four local authorities: Wakefield, Doncaster, Sheffield and the East Riding of Yorkshire. The inclusion of an academy in Rotherham is imminent. Plans are well-advanced for two secondary and four primary academies to become part of WCAT by September 2015. This includes Carr Lane, a new purpose-built primary academy in Doncaster. Two schools judged good at the time of their inspection have asked to join WCAT. The trust's education, business administrative and finance teams have expanded accordingly, all within an agreed DfE growth plan.

## **Summary findings**

WCAT has articulated its vision across its family of academies very successfully. Trust and academy leaders speak enthusiastically about a shared sense of purpose and culture of improvement. 'Setting children on the right way', 'raising staff morale' and 'challenge and change with dignity' are common explanations of the trust's approach to raising aspirations, achievement and driving improvement. Two years into its development, WCAT is making a positive difference to the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils within its academies.

All four academies that were subject to recent section 5 inspections have improved their overall effectiveness by at least a grade. Three now require improvement to be good; their predecessor schools were all judged inadequate. The sixth form in one academy is now good. A primary academy, previously judged inadequate, has improved by two grades and is now good. The HMI monitoring report for one academy indicates that that academy is continuing to make reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. Monitoring reports for the remaining secondary academy, which is also in special measures, identify the positive difference trust staff are making to pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching and leadership and management.

The trust has a good knowledge and understanding of individual academies' strengths and weaknesses. Trust leaders and directors are tenacious in gathering a range of information and data about pupils' achievements, progress and attendance. Their knowledge is strengthened by the quality of information collected from staff who provide targeted support to academies and by the requirement of all academies to report pupil achievement, attendance and exclusion information to the trust board at six-weekly intervals. Academy leaders speak convincingly about how they are increasingly held to account for the achievements of their pupils through formal discussions and reporting of the outcomes of such data.

Leaders use this information appropriately to allocate, target or redirect support to academies in need and to tackle any cross-academy issues. Evidence of the impact

of such work can be seen in the regular, detailed performance reports for each academy. Current assessment information indicates that academies, including those with the lowest baseline of achievement, are improving on previous years' achievements. In the majority of academies, there is a reduction in the gap between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils. Trust and academy leaders are aware that there is still much more to do to ensure that gaps are narrowing at an appropriate rate, in particular for boys and pupils with identified special educational needs. Actions are in place to tackle academies that are continuing to cause concern because performance gaps between different groups remain too wide.

The board has a very clear understanding about the quality of teaching because trust directors, along with national and local leaders of education, work closely with academy leaders observing lessons and scrutinising pupils' work and the quality of feedback and marking, alongside checking progress towards key areas identified for improvement in each academy. Recent monitoring and inspection reports identify the improvements being made to the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning and progress. The recent implementation of a common teacher appraisal process across the trust has ensured that every teacher is now responsible for the progress all of their pupils make in every class they teach, rather than, as previously, for end of key stage outcomes. It is too early to see the full impact of this strategy but headteachers who spoke to inspectors during this visit consider this has been pivotal in improving the effectiveness of performance management arrangements.

The trust has set out its vision in a strategic plan with a small number of key priorities. The plan identifies the vision and ethos of WCAT successfully. As yet, it does not accurately reflect the emerging key school improvement priorities that follow the continual monitoring of academy's work, nor the changes that will need to take place as the trust expands. Trust and academy leaders are committed to working in partnership with parents and carers. The chief executive officer eloquently describes the range of interactions and discussions that take place. However, this commitment is not reflected clearly enough within the strategic plan's priorities. Underpinning action plans do not always have measurable targets, timescales or baseline information against which success of actions can be measured easily on an ongoing basis over the life of the plan.

Reviews and monitoring reports from trust staff regarding their work with individual academies are very detailed. They provide significant evidence of the regular monitoring taking place, the checking of the work of academy leaders and of the staff supporting the academy. However, the impact of this work is not recorded clearly enough in such reports.

The cultivation of the skills, competencies and confidence of staff lies at the heart of the trust's improvement strategy. The trust utilises the skills of its own national leaders of education, directors (senior staff from the trust who work in across academies) and subject specialists to provide a range of training and development opportunities to teachers, leaders and staff across the trust. Trust leaders have developed strong links with a range of partners including regional and national

universities to raise aspirations of pupils, expectations of teachers, enhance professional development opportunities and to learn from good practice. Academy leaders confirm universally the high regard they hold for the continuing professional development opportunities they and their staff receive. Such work is a strength of the trust and a major factor in the improvements in pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching and leadership and management across the trust. Academy leaders report how cross-trust training is also helping to develop sustainability of leadership in academies, nurture the common vision and values of the trust and share the current good practice that exists in academies across the trust.

The trust also looks beyond its own boundaries to secure additional expertise and experience at both whole-trust level and academy leader or individual teacher level when needed. The trust has developed effective partnerships with local authorities, as exemplified by the reciprocal commissioning of support from the senior officers from Wakefield council when needed and the targeted school improvement work WCAT provides for maintained schools within Wakefield.

Academy governors appreciate the range of training they can access and the regular keeping-in-touch meetings between chairs of local governing bodies and the chair of the board. While this goes some way in helping local governing bodies to understand their roles, not all academy leaders and governors are clear about the responsibilities linked to these roles. This is partly because the trust's scheme of delegation is insufficiently clear about the demarcation of responsibilities between the trust board and local governing bodies. Trust leaders are aware of this and, as the trust has grown in size, have become aware that the scheme needs revising to take account of the broader community of academies and ensure that leaders, local governing bodies and other stakeholders are clear about the delegation of responsibilities.

Effective links have been developed with children's services in the local authorities where WCAT operates to support pupils at risk and ensure effective safeguarding arrangements. Leaders keep abreast of issues of concern in the community and staff are suitably trained in identifying risks and how to respond to concerns or allegations. This includes training staff on how to be alert, and respond, to potential signs of extremism or radicalisation, child sexual exploitation or children missing from education. Some very robust work has been undertaken by one director on pupils out of school or in alternative provision. As a result, many pupils previously in alternative education are now back in the academy and practices and procedures have been improved across the trust.

The chief operating officer of the trust makes sure safeguarding training for staff and designated leaders for child protection is up to date and delivered at an appropriate level. However, leaders of the trust are aware that, as academies transfer into the trust, not all child protection policies meet statutory requirements. Action is being taken to check and guide individual academy leaders to ensure that policies are compliant on entry to minimise risks. This work is developing but not enough has been done yet to ensure that local governing bodies report and review the impact of their policies consistently well. Nevertheless, senior leaders in the trust ensure that

information regarding any safeguarding allegations or concerns from academies or local communities are considered and inform future practice. For example, the senior director for education has developed trust-wide guidance for crisis incident management procedures to guide and support individual academies following his identification of concerns in one local community.

Rigorous tracking of pupils' attendance and the subsequent challenge brought to bear on leaders, pupils and parents are making a positive difference to the attendance rates in most academies. The regular tracking shows that absence rates are generally falling, but leaders accept there are still a number of academies where persistent absence rates are too high. Partnership working with local authority education welfare officers, support to families and pupils and movement to prosecution when needed is starting to show improvement, but there is still much to do to reduce the stubbornly high absence rates in two academies. Work to improve the involvement of pupils at risk of exclusion has helped to reduce the proportion of fixed period exclusion in virtually all academies. Again, although reducing, leaders are aware there is still work to do to reduce the higher-than-average proportion in two academies.

Not all governing body reports to parents on the academy's use of the pupil premium are effective in helping parents to understand how well disadvantaged pupils are doing compared with non-disadvantaged pupils. Nor do the reports explain sufficiently clearly the extent to which academies are successful in closing the gaps between the achievements of each group compared with gaps found nationally. In order to ensure that governing bodies fulfil their duties, the trust has commissioned consultants to check current policies and to guide governing bodies and academy leaders in developing policies that meet local needs and statutory requirements, as well as representing good practice in the field.

## **Recommendations**

- Ensure that actions identified to raise achievement of underachieving groups such as boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs drive the required improvements and narrow further the gaps where they exist.
- Work with all academy leaders to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent or temporarily excluded from the academies where rates remain too high.
- Revisit the scheme of delegation to ensure that it takes account of changes to the trust's size and makes clear the demarcation of roles and responsibilities of the trust board and local governing bodies.
- Make sure that local governing bodies carry out their responsibilities in developing up-to-date policies that meet statutory requirements and ensure that policies are monitored and reviewed for impact within the required timescales.
- Ensure that the strategic plan includes the future priorities of the trust and explains how the trust will work with and communicate with parents and carers.

- Refine improvement plans to ensure the trust's board and academy leaders can check the impact of actions to bring about improvement taken by the staff in the academies in which they are working.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex: Academies that are currently part of Wakefield City Academy Trust

### Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 5 inspections 11 to 15 May 2015

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Inspection grade in May 2015 (provis.)
Havercroft Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	September 2013	Not previously inspected	Overall effectiveness: requires improvement. Early Years Foundation Stage: good.
Hemsworth Arts and Community Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	September 2013	Not previously inspected	Overall effectiveness: requires improvement
West End Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	October 2013	Not previously inspected	Overall effectiveness: good
Balby Carr Community Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	November 2013	Not previously inspected	Overall effectiveness requires improvement; sixth form: good

### Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – monitoring inspections 11 to 15 May 2015

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Most recent s5 inspection grade	Monitoring inspection: May 2015
Yewlands Technology College	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Sheffield	September 2011	Grade 4 - serious weaknesses, March 2014	Making reasonable progress

### Academies that were part of the focused telephone calls 11 to 15 May 2015

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection grade and date
Wakefield City Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	February 2012	Not previously inspected as an academy	Grade 1 – outstanding, March 2013
Goole High School Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	East Riding of Yorkshire	February 2012	Grade 4 - special measures, December 2013	Monitoring report April 2015: making reasonable progress
Willow Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	April 2012	Grade 4 - special measures, April 2013	Grade 3 - requires improvement, December 2014
Heath View Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Wakefield	September 2014	Not previously inspected	Not yet inspected as an academy
Montague Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	May 2014	Not previously inspected	Not yet inspected as an academy

### Other academies

Academy name	Region	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection grade and date
Carr Lodge Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	To open September 2015	Not yet inspected as an academy
Create Studio	North East Yorkshire and Humber	East Riding of Yorkshire	Closing and being merged with Goole High School Academy.	
Mexborough Academy	North East Yorkshire and Humber	Doncaster	January 2015	Not yet inspected as an academy