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Mr Wayne Norrie
Chief Executive Officer
Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust
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Dear Mr Norrie

Focused review of Greenwood Academies Trust

Following the inspections of six of the academies in the Greenwood Academies Trust ('GAT' or 'the Trust') from 1 to 3 November 2016, and the subsequent follow-up discussions between you, the trustees, other trust leaders and Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), 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 my visit with my colleague Di Mullan HMI on 9 and 10 November 2016. Please pass on my thanks to your staff and trustees, who kindly gave up their time to meet us. The findings from our review of the Trust's overall performance are set out below.

Summary of main findings

- This is a large, underperforming trust that has let down pupils over a number of years and across a number of schools. Half of the six schools inspected require special measures and two of the four secondary academies that had previously been inspected have declined since their last inspection. None has improved.
- The Trust has not done enough over recent years to identify the weaknesses and needs of its academies and has not put in place effective support to ensure sustained improvement. Leaders have not spotted and reacted quickly enough to the underperformance of key groups of pupils across the Trust, such as disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils.
- Trustees have not been effective in ensuring that academy principals are sufficiently held to account for improving outcomes for pupils or for the use of

government monies such as the pupil premium funding. Governance remains ineffective, unwieldy and poorly understood by some principals and trust officers.

- Pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and those in the Trust's secondary academies, are not achieving well.
- Effective curriculum support has not been in place in either the primary or secondary phases to ensure that pupils are sufficiently well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
- Current leaders acknowledge that the Trust has not been effective in ensuring sustained improvement to its schools. Since the appointment of the current chief executive officer, the Trust has undergone a period of significant change and restructuring.
- Since the start of this academic year the Trust has set clearer and higher expectations of its academies in respect of their performance. However, this has been too late in the life of the Trust to ensure that all academies got off to a good start.
- In September 2016, the Trust made several key appointments and moved to a regional structure for school improvement. These changes are beginning to have some early impact in improving outcomes for children and pupils in some of the Trust's academies. However, it is very early days and any impact seen is extremely limited.

Context

- Greenwood Academies Trust is the 11th largest multi-academy trust in the country. It has 31 academies: 21 primary academies; nine secondary academies; and one special school.
- The Trust comprises 27 sponsor-led academies, two academy converters and two free schools.
- All academies are located in the East Midlands and the East of England regions, spread across eight local authorities.
- The first of Greenwood's academies opened in September 2009 and the Trust expanded rapidly in 2012/13. The most recent academy opened in September 2016.
- Around 85% of GAT's academies were judged to be less than good on or prior to joining the Trust. Of the 27 academies for which such data is available, 24 are located in areas with the highest levels of social deprivation.

You took up the post of chief executive officer of the Trust in January 2016, having previously been an executive principal in the Trust. Two education directors oversee academy improvement, monitoring the work of six senior education advisers. There is a vacancy for a senior education adviser for secondary academies. The board of trustees carries out the statutory functions of governance for all academies within

the Trust. Academy advisory committees are intended to provide a local, community perspective. At the time of the focused review, not all academies had a fully functioning advisory committee. The chair of the board of trustees stepped down recently and a new chair was appointed.

Greenwood Academies Trust was selected for a focused review because Ofsted's analysis of pupils' outcomes in 2015 revealed significant concerns about the underperformance of pupils in the Trust's academies.

Evidence

Inspections of six trust academies were carried out from 1 to 3 November 2016. Five of these inspections were carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and one was a short inspection carried out under section 8 of the same Act. Two of the academies had not been inspected previously. The outcomes of the section 5 inspections were:

- One academy that had not been inspected previously was judged to be good.
- One academy continued to require improvement.
- One academy that had not been inspected previously was judged to require special measures.
- Two academies that were previously judged to require improvement had declined and were judged to require special measures.

The outcome of the short inspection carried out under section 8 was that the academy continues to provide a good standard of education.

HMI held telephone discussions with the principals of 12 other GAT academies on 3 and 4 November 2016. During the follow-up visit, HMI held discussions with the chief executive officer, education directors, trustees, senior education advisers and the newly appointed 'Ebacc advisers'. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of relevant documentation, including the Trust's self-evaluation and improvement plans, governance arrangements, information on pupils' achievement, a review of pupil premium spending, policies and minutes of meetings. The Trust's package for professional development was considered, as was the central offer for special educational needs and inclusion. Inspectors looked at the Trust's online system for monitoring attendance and the systems for collecting information about the quality of educational provision in GAT academies.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Main findings

The inspection outcomes for GAT academies, including the most recent inspections, are:

- two academies are outstanding
- 17 are good
- three require improvement
- three are inadequate
- six academies are yet to be inspected.

The Trust has improved the overall effectiveness of 20 academies since they joined GAT. A further two academies have remained good. While this is in line with the national trend of improvement, the Trust has been much more effective in improving provision in its primary schools than in its secondary schools. Poorer capacity and weaker improvement planning in the secondary phase leave the Trust ill-equipped to offer effective support to the academies in this phase.

Six secondary academies had previously been inspected as trust schools. Of these, two have remained good; two remain as requiring improvement, and two have declined and are now judged to require special measures.

Inspection has identified that the common weaknesses across secondary GAT academies that are less than good are:

- pupils' overall achievement, which remains below national averages and is not improving quickly enough
- key groups of pupils, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils, have significantly underachieved over a number of years; this was not identified by the Trust until very recently
- the variability of the quality of support that academies have received from the Trust.

Outcomes for pupils have not improved quickly enough. There continued to be widespread underachievement in the Trust's secondary academies in 2015. The proportion of pupils who left GAT academies with five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was well below the national level. Every academy in the Trust was below the national level on this measure. Two academies saw an increase in this measure from 2014, but the other five academies with pupils in Year 11 saw a decline. Thirty-seven percent of pupils in the Trust achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics compared to 57% nationally.

While it is true to say that the prior attainment of pupils in GAT secondary academies is significantly below the national average, it is equally true that the Trust has not been successful in ensuring that pupils make good progress from their starting points. The proportion of pupils who made the progress expected in English and mathematics from key stage 2 to key stage 4 was significantly below average in almost all GAT academies.

The achievement of disadvantaged pupils in GAT's secondary academies in 2015 is deeply concerning. Across the Trust, there were 578 disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 in 2015. Of these, just 26% achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics compared to 57% of all pupils nationally. This meant that almost three quarters of the disadvantaged pupils within the Trust, or 428 pupils, left secondary school ill-prepared for further education, training or employment.

The attainment of this group represented poor progress from their starting points. The overall progress made by these pupils was significantly below the level that pupils can be expected to make between key stage 2 and key stage 4. It was significantly below average in six of the seven secondary academies with Year 11 pupils, and was worse in these academies than it had been in 2014. Only one academy managed to improve the progress of these pupils. Fewer than half of disadvantaged pupils made the expected progress in English. This equates to 304 pupils not making the expected progress between key stages 2 and 4. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who made expected progress in mathematics was even lower: four out of 10 pupils achieved this measure. This meant that 336 pupils did not make good enough progress in mathematics between key stages 2 and 4.

Of concern, too, is the achievement of the most able pupils in GAT academies, particularly in the secondary phase. In 2015, 54% of the most able pupils across the Trust achieved a B grade or above in English and mathematics, placing the Trust 14th of 14 large secondary multi-academy trusts on this measure.¹ The progress of the most able pupils was significantly below the national level in six of the seven secondary academies that had Year 11 pupils; in three of these academies, the most able pupils made less progress than other ability groups. In all secondary GAT academies, the most able pupils made less progress in 2015 than this group did in 2014.

Unvalidated data for 2016 suggests that pupils in GAT academies have continued to underachieve. Using the new measure of the proportion achieving GCSEs at grades A* to C in English and mathematics, six academies are below the national level, while two are above. The Trust average, at 38%, albeit on unvalidated data, is well below the national level of 58%. The progress made by pupils indicates continued underachievement: four of the Trust's nine secondary academies have a Progress 8

¹ A large secondary multi-academy trust is one that contains eight or more secondary academies.

score that is in the bottom 10% of all schools nationally. Disadvantaged pupils continue to achieve less well than others.

While on the whole better performing, the primary phase is not without weaknesses. The proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2015, at 71%, was below national levels (80%). The progress made by pupils across the primary academies was in line with that seen nationally, but the relatively positive headline figures mask the underachievement of some groups of pupils. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2015, at 67%, was well below that of all pupils nationally. Additionally, the proportion of these pupils who made expected progress was below that of all pupils nationally in all subjects.

Unconfirmed data for 2016 indicates that pupils in GAT academies were not well prepared for the demands of the new primary curriculum and have underachieved compared to pupils nationally. The proportion who achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was well below the national level. The proportion who achieved the higher standard, at less than 1%, was well below the national average of 5%, and indicates that the most able pupils in GAT's primary academies are not making good progress. Progress in reading is in the bottom 10% in four academies, and in the bottom 10% in five academies in mathematics.

The Trust has been more successful in ensuring that children get off to a good start at school. The proportion who have achieved a good level of development in the early years has risen steadily over the past three years. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieve this measure has also risen consistently. The proportion of pupils who pass the phonics screening test has risen to be in line with the national average. However, analysis of achievement at the end of key stage 1 shows that children have not consistently capitalised on early gains in their learning.

Current leaders recognise that, until recently, not enough was done to identify the weaknesses and needs of individual academies and put in place effective support to ensure sustained improvement. Leaders have not spotted and reacted quickly enough to the underperformance of key groups of pupils across the Trust, such as disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils, because the systems to identify weaknesses and offer appropriate intervention have been weak. Until recently, leaders did not have a system for collecting and analysing data about the performance of pupils in GAT academies. This meant that trustees did not have detailed information about how well groups of pupils were doing, and were not able to provide sufficient challenge to leaders.

The mechanisms of governance are inconsistent and have hindered accountability. Principals were, until recently, accountable to executive principals, who in turn

reported to trustees on the performance of academies. The executive principals were not consistently effective in holding principals to account. It has taken too long for the Trust to put in place appropriate structures to support and hold academies to account. Leaders have also not been sufficiently held to account for use of the significant levels of pupil premium funding received by the Trust.

Recently, the Trust has appointed two education directors who oversee the work of senior education advisers. It is the role of the senior education advisers to provide support and challenge to academies and to hold principals to account. While there is some evidence that these changes have led to some improvement, they are not consistently effective. Some principals who spoke with inspectors did not fully understand the governance structures. Not all senior education advisers were clear about the role of the reconstituted standards and inclusion committee. While principals were almost universally positive about the work of the senior education advisers, a few who spoke with inspectors said they would welcome greater accountability or, as one principal put it, 'governance with teeth'.

The Trust has not been effective in ensuring that improvements, particularly in the secondary phase, were maintained, or in reversing the decline in some academies.

Leaders from the Trust did not ensure that effective curriculum support was in place in either the primary or secondary phases to prepare pupils for the next stage of their learning. The proportion of pupils from secondary academies that have gone on to further education, employment or training is below the national average. There is now a trust-wide strategy in place to improve employability skills for pupils in both primary and secondary academies. These developments have had some early success, for example in the increased proportion of pupils who have taken up apprenticeships. While promising, it is too soon to judge the full impact of this initiative.

Prior to the beginning of this academic year, there was no effective model for the professional development of teachers and other staff across the Trust. The learning alliance that has been developed in response to this deficiency has met with enthusiasm from principals and trust staff.

Leaders are developing a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each academy, because the procedures to identify these have improved. Systems to collect information are working more effectively. At the end of the last academic year, trustees recognised that they did not have sufficiently detailed information about the performance of academies and outcomes for pupils, including for groups of pupils. Consequently, the trustees asked for this information to be brought to the standards and inclusion committee. In September 2016, this trust-wide data was available for the first time. It is not yet clear how this data is being used, but there is formal recognition that searching scrutiny by this committee is long overdue.

The small number of Ebacc advisers are providing effective support to middle leaders in academies and are enabling leaders to have a clearer sense of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, they are too few in number and, inevitably, are responding to the academies most in need. There is too little capacity to be able to improve these subjects consistently well across all academies.

In our conversations with principals it became clear that they did not all fully understand how Trust leaders assess their academy's performance, and what this means for the support they will receive. It is not sufficiently clear how resources are shared across academies according to need.

Planning for improvement in the secondary phase is not as strong as in the primary phase. Success criteria are not always clear, nor is it apparent how the outcomes of actions will be monitored. Planning in the primary sector is better. The development of regional improvement plans is helping the senior education advisers to have a clear understanding of where improvements are needed. However, here too there is some confusion in respect of accountability. There is a lack of capacity in terms of who will lead on and take responsibility for secondary improvement, and insufficient capacity within the Trust to adequately support secondary academies.

Trustees have recently recognised the need to review and amend the structures of governance and amend the terms of reference for the different layers of governance. The appointment of new trustees has brought a greater level of expertise and breadth of skills to challenge Trust leaders. However, at this point not all the newly formed committees have conducted a fully attended meeting, and some parts of the restructuring are not yet complete.

From our meetings with you and your staff, it was clear that a strong sense of vision and values is driving the current work of the Trust. You have shown that you have an accurate understanding of what needed to change, and your self-evaluation shows that you have identified the right priorities for improvement. The new systems you have put in place are not yet complete, or consistently understood, but there is evidence of small improvements, for example in phonics and in the early years. There is some evidence of where the Trust has improved or is improving leadership. For example, the inspection of Kingswood Secondary Academy found that the principal appointed by the Trust had taken decisive and effective action to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. The inspection of Beacon Primary Academy found that the Trust 'provides very good support to the school and this has enabled the school to make very good progress since it opened'.

Since the start of this academic year, the Trust has set clearer and higher expectations of academies in respect of their performance. The relatively recent introduction of these expectations has meant that they have not had an impact yet.

None of the recent developments have had time to make overarching, sustained improvements to the quality of education offered. There are ongoing weaknesses that urgently need addressing.

Governance remains weak and ineffective. You describe governance as unwieldy, and inspectors agree. It is not understood by all principals and advisers in the Trust. The role of the academy advisory councils is not consistently well understood. The current trust and governance arrangements are published on the websites for individual academies. However, not all academies have an established advisory council. Where they are in place, they are not consistently effective, although inspectors found one example where it was working well.

The board of trustees has delegated many functions to different committees. However, until very recently, the standards and inclusion committee has not been effective in holding the chief executive officer, executive principals, academy principals and education advisers to account for improved outcomes.

Safeguarding

You have recently appointed a safeguarding officer, who is providing training to support the safeguarding leads across the Trust. Trust-wide policies on safeguarding, safer recruitment and whistleblowing are supported by local practice guidance in individual academies. Some audits of safeguarding practices have taken place as part of your plan to do so in all GAT academies. However, not all principals understand how the Trust will check that their safeguarding processes are fit for purpose. They are not clear about the governance of this aspect of their work, and were not able to tell inspectors, for example, who was responsible for ensuring that academies fulfil their statutory duties in relation to the safeguarding arrangements.

Recommendations

- Urgently improve outcomes for pupils, particularly in secondary academies.
- Improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils across the Trust.
- Ensure that those academies that are not yet good, or where outcomes are declining, are rapidly identified and given appropriate support to make necessary and sustainable improvements.
- Ensure that there is sufficient capacity to improve the performance of all academies within the Trust, especially the secondary academies.
- Improve the effectiveness of governance at all levels, by ensuring that:
 - there is clarity regarding roles and responsibilities
 - principals and leaders at all levels fully understand the systems of governance

- all principals and leaders are rigorously held to account for their role in improving outcomes for pupils
- the standards and inclusion committee is effective in using all the available information to hold leaders to account for the improvement of academies.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: GAT academies

Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 5 inspections

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement (date)	Inspection grade in November 2016
Beacon Primary Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	01/09/2014	Not previously inspected	2
City of Derby Academy	East Midlands	Derby	01/06/2013	3 (2015)	4
Green Oaks Primary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/01/2014	Not previously inspected	4
Kingswood Secondary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/09/2013	3 (2015)	3
Weston Favell Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/09/2012	3 (2014)	4

Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 8 inspections

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement (date)	Inspection grade in November 2016
Nottingham Girls' Academy	East Midlands	Nottingham	01/09/2011	2 (2013)	2

Other academies

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Latest inspection date	Most recent overall effectiveness grade
Bishop Creighton Academy	East of England	Peterborough	01/05/2011	21/01/2016	3
City of Peterborough Academy	East of England	Peterborough	01/09/2013	22/04/2015	1
City of Peterborough Academy, Special School	East of England	Peterborough	17/08/2012	27/02/2014	2
Corby Primary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/09/2013	03/07/2015	1
Danesholme Infant School	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/09/2016	Not yet inspected	
Danesholme Junior Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/09/2015	Not yet inspected	
Dogsthorpe Academy	East of England	Peterborough	01/09/2014	Not yet inspected	
Hazel Leys Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/09/2015	Not yet inspected	
Houghton Regis Academy	East of England	Central Bedfordshire	01/09/2012	09/07/2014	3
Ingoldmells Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	01/09/2012	09/05/2014	2
Kingswood Primary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/04/2013	11/02/2015	2
Mablethorpe Primary Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	01/09/2012	26/06/2014	2
Mansfield Primary Academy	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	01/09/2012	30/04/2014	2
Newark Hill Academy	East of England	Peterborough	01/04/2014	Not yet inspected	
Nottingham Academy	East Midlands	Nottingham	01/09/2009	10/11/2015	2
Queensmead	East Midlands	Leicester	01/11/2012	05/06/2014	2

Primary Academy					
Rushden Primary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/09/2015	Not yet inspected	
Skegby Junior Academy	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	01/09/2013	15/05/2015	2
Skegness Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	01/09/2010	04/10/2012	2
Skegness Infant Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	01/09/2012	08/10/2014	2
Skegness Junior Academy	East Midlands	Lincolnshire	01/09/2012	25/06/2014	2
Stanground Academy	East of England	Peterborough	01/04/2012	12/02/2014	2
Sunnyside Primary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/02/2013	18/09/2014	2
Welland Academy	East of England	Peterborough	01/10/2013	15/07/2015	2
Woodvale Primary Academy	East Midlands	Northamptonshire	01/02/2013	09/10/2014	2