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26 June 2023

Laurie Kwissa, Chief Executive Officer
Margaret Swinson, Chair of the Board of Directors
Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust
St James House
20 St James Road
Liverpool
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Dear Mrs Kwissa and Mrs Swinson

Summary evaluation of Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust

Following the summary evaluation of Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust (or 'the trust') in May 2023, when I was accompanied by Emma Gregory, His Majesty's Inspector, and Ahmed Marikar, His Majesty's Inspector, I am writing on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings.

The summary evaluation has been conducted in accordance with the provisions of the operational note.

Thank you for your cooperation during our visit to the trust between Monday 15 May 2023 and Thursday 18 May 2023. Please pass on our thanks to your staff and other stakeholders, who kindly gave up their time to meet with us.

The findings from the summary evaluation and any recommendations for improvement are set out within this outcome letter.

Context

The trust is a multi-phase, Church of England academy trust. The trust comprises 16 primary schools and one secondary school. Pupils at the trust's schools range from the ages of two to 18 years. The schools are located in the local authority areas of Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, Warrington and Wigan. The trust was established in 2017 by the Diocese of Liverpool.

The trust's schools vary in size from approximately 133 pupils in Glazebury Church of England Primary School to approximately 679 pupils in St Michael's Church of England High School.

At the time of the summary evaluation, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the trust was 24.9%, which is in line with the national average. However, eight schools have a considerably higher number of disadvantaged pupils than other schools in the trust.

The proportion of pupils in the trust with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is broadly in line with the national average.

The trust board is made up of 12 trustees, who are known as directors. The directors are responsible for the strategic oversight and performance of the trust and its schools. The chief executive officer (CEO) joined the trust in September 2017.

Currently, the inspection outcomes for the trust's schools, including for the most recent inspections, are as follows:

- six schools are judged to be outstanding
- 10 schools are judged to be good
- one school is judged to require improvement
- six schools have yet to be inspected since joining the trust.

Summary of stage 1

At stage 1 of this summary evaluation, seven schools were inspected from September 2022 to March 2023. All these inspections were routine inspections and they were carried out under either section 5 (graded) or section 8 (ungraded) of the Education Act 2005 (the Act), as amended.

The inspection outcomes were as follows:

- four schools had their first ungraded inspections as academy convertors and all four schools retained their judgement of good
- two schools had their first graded inspections as academy convertors and both these schools improved from requires improvement to good
- one school had its second graded inspection since joining the trust and this school declined from good to requires improvement.

Summary of stage 2

Over the course of the on-site visit to the trust, discussions were held with you and other senior and operational staff. We met with seven representatives of the board of directors, including the chair and the vice-chair of the board. We also met with 10 members of local governing bodies. We visited seven trust schools that had not been inspected during stage 1 of the summary evaluation process. Two of these schools were visited virtually. In each of these schools, we met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, a selection of leaders responsible for subjects and several early career teachers. We also spoke with the headteachers of two primary schools by telephone. We held a virtual meeting with the two deputy headteachers and the special educational needs coordinator of the secondary school.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Quality of Education

The CEO and executive leaders have an uncompromising vision for, and a commitment to, ensuring that pupils across Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust benefit from a high-quality education. This is irrespective of pupils' background or ability. Executive leaders' vision is rooted deeply in the trust's core values and Christian ethos. Trust leaders are determined to value each school's individuality. As a result, they have worked closely with school leaders to co-produce a set of overarching curriculum principles, while also protecting the uniqueness of each school's context.

School leaders champion the autonomy that they have to design their own curriculums. The CEO and executive leaders are fiercely passionate about the curriculum being accessible and equitable for all pupils. Executive leaders have supported school leaders extensively to ensure that school curriculums are increasingly knowledge-rich, well organised and ambitious for all pupils, including those pupils with SEND. The trust inclusion leader is supporting staff to develop further their adaptive teaching strategies for pupils with additional needs. In the trust's primary schools, the impact of this work is visible in inspection outcomes. The inspection of the secondary school highlighted that staff make appropriate adjustments so that pupils with SEND can access the same learning as their peers.

Senior leaders across trust schools have recently collaborated on the development of a teaching and learning toolkit. This aims to improve consistency in the delivery of the curriculum across all schools. However, in a few schools, including the secondary school, leaders are still in the process of identifying the most important knowledge that pupils must learn. Added to this, executive leaders are further developing systems for checking how well pupils are learning the wider curriculum in primary schools. This is so that executive leaders have a deeper understanding of how well pupils are learning in some subjects in some schools.

In the primary age-phase, most pupils, including pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged, achieve well. Where this is not the case, the CEO and executive leaders have implemented targeted support to address any weaknesses at a local level. Executive leaders are acting decisively to address the weaknesses in leadership and the curriculum in the secondary school.

Reading is prioritised across the trust. Executive leaders successfully monitor and address the performance of individual schools in relation to phonics outcomes. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 also benefit from phonics provision, when necessary. This is helping these pupils to catch up quickly with their reading knowledge. The CEO is passionate about addressing social disadvantage by continually improving pupils' reading fluency and accuracy across the trust's schools.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Behaviour and Attitudes

The CEO and executive leaders have embedded a culture of positive behaviour across the schools. All schools in the trust that were inspected during stage 1 of the summary evaluation were judged to be good for behaviour and attitudes. Pupils across both the primary and secondary age-phases behave well. Inspectors reported that pupils are polite, kind and tolerant. Pupils' behaviour reflects the trust's ethos and core values, as well as leaders' high expectations for all.

Along with the curriculum, school leaders have the autonomy to develop their own behaviour policies. The CEO and executive leaders have a strong oversight of how well behaviour policies are being implemented by school leaders. Education officer visits, which are an integral part of the school improvement strategy, include a specific focus on behaviour. The CEO has facilitated appropriate behaviour support for individual schools when necessary, including through the Department for Education (DfE) behaviour hub.

While behaviour is not a concern, trust leaders have recognised that many schools are facing increased challenges following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Executive leaders have responded swiftly to this issue. They are in the process of developing trust-wide, guiding principles for pupils' behaviour and their mental health and well-being. Trust leaders are mindful of the link between achievement and pupils' behaviour in the classroom. To this end, they have ensured that a strand of the teaching and learning toolkit is about promoting positive behaviour for learning.

The trust's centralised attendance policy is personalised to the individual needs of each school. School leaders were effusive about the impact of the attendance dashboard, which is enabling them to pinpoint where they need to improve pupils' rates of attendance. The implementation of the attendance dashboard is increasing

the rigour with which trust leaders and local governing bodies hold school leaders to account for pupils' rates of attendance.

Executive leaders successfully monitor behaviour across the trust and at a local level. Behaviour and attendance networks, led by the CEO, add another level of accountability to individual schools. School leaders value the opportunities to learn from good practice in other trust schools. The 'trust on a page' system successfully provides executive leaders with pertinent information about schools. Added to this, school leaders are held to account by local governing bodies, which provide directors with regular behaviour and attendance reports.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Leadership and Management

The trust's vision and values are clearly understood by school leaders. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that individual school improvement priorities align with the trust's strategic priorities. The CEO is unwavering in her commitment to building leadership capacity in the central trust team. This is particularly important as the trust grows.

Leadership development is a high priority for the trust. The CEO is relentless in her drive to create self-sustaining and self-improving schools. Intelligent collaboration is at the heart of the trust's philosophy. Collaborative practice is an integral part of daily life for leaders at all levels in schools. There is a clear understanding that the trust is committed to growing its own leaders.

Opportunities for staff in trust schools to collaborate are well thought out, purposeful and extensive. Trust staff value opportunities to support the development of staff in other trust schools. The impact on the quality of education for pupils is tangible in the primary age-phase and developing in the secondary age-phase. The wealth of network meetings available, for example for subject leaders, SEND leaders and early years leaders, is having a positive impact on building staff's expertise. Staff new to the trust, including early career teachers, are inducted well.

The CEO's school improvement strategy is sharply focused on the most important priorities, for example assessment systems. The core offer for schools includes termly visits and monitoring by trust education officers and the CEO. The myriad of effective quality assurance systems in place enables the executive team to identify precisely which aspects of a school's provision need improving. The CEO and executive leaders judiciously match tailored support to the improvement needs of each school. Each strand of the quality assurance programme is fully triangulated at executive leader level.

Executive leaders intervene swiftly when schools require more intensive support, for example through monitoring boards, which involve directors and the CEO. Directors use the executive headteacher model strategically to support and challenge leaders to improve through coaching. The CEO and executive leaders have an in-depth and well-informed knowledge of each school in the trust.

Leaders' well-being is high on the trust's agenda, with opportunities for headteachers to meet regularly. Headteachers are highly appreciative of the forums set up by the CEO, which they perceive as a safe place in which they can raise concerns. Trust leaders readily listen to feedback from headteachers and act on this accordingly. Staff at all levels feel valued and invested in and benefit from a wealth of opportunities to support their career progression.

Impact of the trust on its schools – Governance

Recently, the CEO transformed the effectiveness of governance through the implementation of the 'one governance' model. This has galvanised local governing bodies and contributed significantly to increased lines of accountability. Directors understand their roles clearly. Local governing body members are clear about their role and responsibilities in holding leaders to account in their individual schools. There is a greater sense of cohesion in local governing bodies across the trust.

The members of the board of directors have considerable experience and expertise. Directors welcome their involvement with schools at a local level. They recognise that this hands-on approach is further enhancing the effectiveness of the 'one governance' model.

Directors have a secure understanding of the work of executive leaders, including how well the school improvement strategy is being implemented. They hold executive leaders to account effectively. There are strong mechanisms in place for directors to evaluate their own, and the trust's, effectiveness.

Local governors value the autonomy that schools have, as this helps them to retain their identity. Members of local governing bodies attribute their enhanced knowledge and skills to the work that the trust's executive leaders have done to strengthen arrangements for governance. This is helping local governors to challenge school leaders more effectively. However, local governing body members are less clear about how they are accountable to directors. This is one of the key drivers for the reviewed scheme of delegation, which has been welcomed by directors and local governors alike. Directors and local governors recognise the link between further strengthening governance and improving the quality of education that pupils across the trust receive.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding was judged to be effective in all the inspections completed as part of stage 1 of this summary evaluation. Notwithstanding this, the CEO, supported by school leaders and local governing bodies, has commissioned regular external safeguarding audits. These are helping trust leaders and individual schools to ensure that the culture of safeguarding remains strong. Audits are also supporting executive leaders to ascertain that practice remains up to date and aligned with statutory guidance.

The trust-wide approach to safeguarding is effective. The CEO retains overall responsibility for safeguarding across the trust and consequently she reports directly to directors. As the trust continues to grow, the CEO has built further capacity through the appointment of external safeguarding partners.

Comprehensive and regular safeguarding training is provided to all staff across the trust, as well as to directors and local governors. Safeguarding responsibilities are clearly demarcated, and safeguarding arrangements in individual schools are monitored closely by executive leaders and local governing bodies. Designated safeguarding leads ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive timely and appropriate support, when necessary.

The CEO and executive leaders have recently strengthened and unified the systems for reporting safeguarding concerns across the trust's schools. These systems are enabling executive leaders to have strong oversight of patterns of safeguarding concerns and leaders' subsequent actions.

The CEO has ensured that safeguarding is woven throughout the curriculum in each school. Pupils are routinely taught how to stay safe. As part of her termly visits, the CEO meets with pupils to discuss their experiences and to check that pupils understand how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy.

Recommendations

- In a few schools, leaders are still in the process of identifying the most useful knowledge that pupils require for subsequent learning. Currently, this impacts the trust's executive leaders in having a fully comprehensive understanding of how well pupils in these schools are learning in some foundation subjects. Trust leaders should assure themselves that the essential knowledge in each subject is identified, taught and accurately assessed across all age-phases.
- Leaders are in the process of strengthening their 'one governance' model. Currently, some members of local governing bodies are not clear enough about how they are held to account by the board of directors. Trust leaders

should embed the new scheme of delegation to ensure that local governing bodies fully understand how they are accountable for the quality of education that pupils receive.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education and the applicable DfE regional director. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Goodwin
His Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Schools that are part of the trust

| School information | | | | Most recent inspection | | |
|--------------------|--|-----------------|-------------------|---|-----------------|----------|
| URN | School name | Local authority | Date joined trust | Does the inspection relate to the school in its current form? | Inspection date | OE grade |
| 141338 | St Michael's CE High School | Sefton | 01/11/2014 | Yes | 09/11/2022 | 3 |
| 145438 | Bishop Martin CE Primary School | Liverpool | 01/07/2018 | Yes | 09/11/2022 | 2 |
| 146412 | St Helen's CE Primary School | Warrington | 01/10/2018 | Yes | 06/12/2022 | 2 |
| 145453 | St Andrew's CE Primary School | Sefton | 01/05/2018 | Yes | 12/10/2022 | 2 |
| 146429 | St James' CE Primary School | St Helens | 01/10/2018 | Yes | 03/02/2023 | 2 |
| 145107 | St James' CE Primary School | Wigan | 01/04/2018 | Yes | 28/09/2022 | 2 |
| 148365 | Rainford CE Primary School | St Helens | 01/03/2021 | No | 21/06/2017 | 2 |
| 145458 | Parish CE Primary School | St Helens | 01/02/2018 | Yes | 26/01/2022 | 1 |
| 145713 | Highfield St Matthew's CE Primary School | Wigan | 01/11/2018 | Yes | 02/03/2023 | 2 |
| 145096 | St Thomas CE Primary School | Sefton | 01/11/2017 | No | 18/07/2013 | 1 |
| 145454 | Holy Trinity CE Primary School | Sefton | 01/02/2018 | Yes | 05/05/2022 | 2 |
| 145435 | Huyton with Roby CE Primary | Knowsley | 01/02/2018 | Yes | 27/04/2022 | 2 |
| 146399 | St Paul's CE Primary School | Wigan | 01/10/2018 | No | 20/09/2011 | 1 |

| School information | | | | Most recent inspection | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---|-----------------|----------|
| URN | School name | Local authority | Date joined trust | Does the inspection relate to the school in its current form? | Inspection date | OE grade |
| 145086 | The Beacon CE Primary School | Liverpool | 01/12/2017 | No | 27/02/2014 | 1 |
| 143457 | Halewood CE Primary Academy | Knowsley | 01/10/2017 | No | 05/11/2008 | 1 |
| 143456 | Cronton CE Primary Academy | Knowsley | 01/10/2017 | No | 27/03/2013 | 1 |
| 146417 | Glazebury CE Primary School | Warrington | 01/12/2018 | No | 04/06/2015 | 2 |

*Schools highlighted received a graded, ungraded or monitoring inspection in stage 1 of the multi-academy trust summary evaluation.