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20 November 2017

Mr Andrew Read  
Chief Executive Officer  
Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust  
Grace Building  
8 High Street  
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Dear Mr Read

### **Focused review of Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust**

Following the focused review of seven schools from the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT/the Trust) in October 2017, and the subsequent follow-up visit by 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 the cooperation you afforded to Christine Dick HMI and John Lucas HMI on their visit to the Trust on 17–19 October 2017. Please pass on my thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time during this review.

The findings from the focused review and a wider consideration of the Trust's overall performance are set out below.

### **Summary of main findings**

- Since January 2016, DEMAT has been on a journey of systematic improvement. As a result, the quality of education in many of the Trust's schools is improving. The rate of this improvement is increasing.
- You took up your substantive post at the Trust in January 2016. Your candid reflection, decisive leadership and clarity of purpose have done much to improve the effectiveness of provision.
- The Diocese of Ely has a wholehearted commitment to improving the life chances of pupils across schools within the Trust, however small the school and whatever its starting point.
- The Trust was established in 2013 and grew rapidly from one school to 18 by the end of 2015. The rate of school improvement during this period was too variable. This was due to a combination of a lack of diligence and insufficient

capacity to support the increasing number, and varying needs, of the Trust's schools.

- Trust executive leaders, through strong leadership, have corrected the previous imbalance between local autonomy and centrally led accountability. Executive leaders now have a precise understanding of the unique context of each school because they have established effective communications, regular visits and systematic checks on school performance.
- The Trust board now has the breadth of experience, capacity and knowledge to shape DEMAT's strategic direction and development.
- Published outcomes in 2016 demonstrate that pupils' attainment and progress were low in too many schools. You and your team, supported well by trustees, have since put in place systems and structures that are bringing about much-needed improvements. This is evident in provisional 2017 outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 2 and, in particular, in reading.
- In 2016, disadvantaged pupils in the Trust's schools did not achieve well enough. The Trust did not have processes in place to effectively hold schools to account for the use of additional funding to reduce barriers to learning for these pupils. More recently, disadvantaged pupils' progress is improving as a result of actions taken by the Trust and by school leaders to improve the leadership and management of this work.
- In 2016, across the schools, too many pupils were persistently absent. While rates of attendance are improving, the rate of improvement is not consistently rapid.
- Routine monitoring by the Trust ensures that a wealth of information is collected about pupils' achievement. Leaders use this knowledge appropriately to provide bespoke support for schools where aspects of work need to improve.
- The Trust makes increasingly effective use of a range of school improvement strategies, including the use of school-to-school support, external agencies and consultants. However, there is more work to be done to harness the growing strengths and expertise that exist within individual schools to support wider improvements in all schools across the Trust.
- Underperformance in leadership and in teaching is challenged effectively. You have not shied away from taking difficult decisions in the interest of pupils in Trust schools. In 10 of the 13 schools inspected since they joined the Trust, leadership and management have been judged to be good.
- The quality of local governance of schools is inconsistent. Trust leaders are rightly reviewing the effectiveness of school governance as your own evidence demonstrates that this does not regularly meet the high standards expected.
- The Trust provides its schools with valued support in finance and human resources. The Trust's oversight of safeguarding is effective.
- The individual characteristics of each school are celebrated and encouraged. The Trust works hard to add to the life experiences of pupils across the Trust. Evidence from inspections demonstrates that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is provided for well.

## Evidence

Focused inspections of seven schools were carried out between 10 October and 12 October 2017. One of these inspections was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) ('the Act'). This inspection converted to a full inspection under section 5 of the Act. Six of these inspections were carried out under section 5 of the Act.

The inspection outcomes were:

- three schools were judged to be good; three to require improvement; and one to be inadequate<sup>1</sup>
- in five schools, leadership and management were judged to be good.

Telephone discussions were held on 12 and 13 October with headteachers and executive headteachers of 11 other schools in the Trust. During follow-up visits to DEMAT offices, discussions were held with yourself as the chief executive officer, other senior and operational staff, and with trustees. A range of relevant documentation was also scrutinised.

## Context

- DEMAT is a large and growing multi-academy trust, which was established in 2013. It is made up of 27 primary schools which are located in the East of England. The schools are in four local authorities: Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Peterborough and Suffolk.
- Initially, the Trust expanded rapidly, two schools joined in 2013, with 11 schools joining in 2014. A further five joined in 2015. To date, in 2017, an additional three schools have joined the Trust, following on from the six that joined in 2016. Two additional primary schools are in the process of joining the Trust as academy converters. One primary school will be joining as a sponsor-led academy in December 2017.
- Six of the schools are larger than the average-sized primary school, while 11 schools each provide education for fewer than 100 pupils. DEMAT schools typically serve small towns or rural communities.
- Nine schools were inadequate and five required improvement at the point at which they joined the Trust. Of the remaining schools, 11 were good and one outstanding. The Trust also includes one school that has yet to be inspected.
- The DEMAT board is made up of 12 members. There is a central team made up of 12 full-time staff. Several members of this team have joined DEMAT since January 2017. This team is responsible for the strategic and operational work of the Trust. DEMAT also makes use of a range of external agencies and consultants to support its schools.

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<sup>1</sup> At time of draft, this inspection outcome is subject to Ofsted's moderation process.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Regional Director East of England

CC: Peter Maxwell, Chair of Board of Trustees

## **Main findings of the focused review**

- The chief executive officer took up his substantive role in January 2016. He models very well the behaviours he expects of others. He quickly gained a precise understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in DEMAT and has established the correct priorities for improvement. The chief operating officer took up her position in May 2016. Together, with the support of trustees, they have brought about the rapid development of trust structures which are explicitly focused on systematically raising pupil achievement. Over the past 18 months, there has been a significant improvement in the quality and effectiveness of leadership, and operational systems across the Trust.
- The Diocese's unwavering commitment to improving education is evident in each tier of the Trust's leadership. Trustees, the Trust's senior executive team and school leaders share a passionate belief that high quality education 'opens doors' and 'improves life chances'. This commitment is progressively well matched by an increasing knowledge of what needs to be done to bring about the desired improvements. The Trust board has considerable experience and knowledge of education, business and the church. Trustees are able to offer more effective strategic leadership, challenge and support than was previously the case.
- Leaders and trustees now have an accurate understanding of not only the context of each school, but also what needs to be done to improve the quality of provision in individual institutions. As a result, trust executive leaders are well placed to accelerate the trajectory of improvement currently underway.
- Headteachers are very positive about these developments. Headteachers' comments made over the course of the review referred to a 'step change' in the Trust's work, with 'expectations being raised' and evidence of 'more consistency and rigour'. These high expectations and levels of consistency are clearly laid out in the DEMAT quality standards schedule.
- Trustees and trust executive leaders have not been afraid to incorporate very small schools into the Trust, or those schools with a history of considerable underachievement. DEMAT initially grew rapidly. By the end of 2015, the Trust consisted of 18 schools. At the point at which schools joined the Trust during this period: six were judged by Ofsted to be good; one outstanding; five required improvement; and six were judged to be inadequate. Weaknesses in the diligence process and a lack of central capacity meant that the Trust was not well placed to meet the wide variation of needs in these schools, or to monitor their performance effectively.
- Trustees recognise that school improvement, at that point, was often reactive to concerns as they arose, rather than taking preventative action to avoid them happening. As a consequence, the rate of improvement was patchy and, in some cases, was too slow.
- Since 2016, the Trust has continued to grow. While remaining true to the original principles, ethos and commitment to inclusion, this growth has been more measured. Evidence seen during this focused review demonstrates that

trustees and trust executive leaders are currently exercising appropriate levels of professional caution when considering the future expansion of the Trust.

- Across trust schools, in 2016, pupils' attainment was below national figures at key stages 1 and 2. At key stage 1, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard was below national figures in reading, writing and mathematics. At key stage 2 in 2016, 43% of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. This was lower than the 54% nationally. Pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 was significantly below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics separately.
- School level data from 2016 paints a mixed picture of pupil achievement. In the headline key stage 2 measure of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, proportions varied widely. Pupil progress scores were also too variable.
- Recent inspections of trust schools and provisional 2017 pupil achievement information demonstrates that improvements are being made, in particular across key stage 2. The quality of education in early years is also improving as the Trust makes effective use of external support. Nevertheless, trust executive leaders recognise that pupils' outcomes remain too low and that improvement rates need to accelerate further, in particular for most-able pupils as too few achieved higher standards in schools across the Trust.
- At key stage 2 in 2016, disadvantaged pupils in trust schools did not perform well. Indeed, their progress was below that of other pupils nationally in each of reading, writing and mathematics. In some schools it was significantly lower than it should have been.
- Since early 2016, trust executive leaders have rightly provided increased challenge and support for schools to accelerate the progress that disadvantaged pupils make. Strong and improving leadership within the Trust and in schools, aligned with more effective use of external agencies, is helping schools to raise standards. The provisional 2017 achievement information for key stage 2 together with evidence from recent school inspections demonstrate that schools are making increasingly effective use of additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils' achievement.
- In 2016, the rates of persistent absence were higher than the national average in 16 of the Trust's schools. Trust leaders recognise that this is an important area for improvement and that the numbers of pupils persistently absent from schools need to fall more quickly.
- Headteachers value the fact that the Trust celebrates and seeks to promote the distinctive characteristics of each school. Trust executive leaders have taken steps to ensure that, while each school is encouraged to retain its distinctive character, schools share consistently high expectations and adhere to certain trust 'non-negotiable' processes. For example, all schools: use the same financial management software; are part of the same performance management process; and are now required to track pupil progress on the common trust system.
- Quality assurance systems are well understood and consistently applied. Diocese review visits (DRVs), seen by headteachers as a termly 'dialogue of

accountability', take place each term and provide trust executive leaders with a plethora of information about the quality of education provided in each school. Trust executive leaders use evidence from DRVs to provide progressively more precise and effective support and challenge for schools.

- Support is provided by the recently expanded school improvement team and a variety of external agencies as part of a well-organised training programme. Increasing the progress of the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially in schools where there are small numbers of pupils, remains a high priority of the school improvement team's work.
- Evidence from recent focused inspections indicates that trust support is having an increasingly positive impact on school improvement. Trust executive leaders make some use of school-to-school support, but recognise that more needs to be done to make best use of the expertise available in individual schools.
- Trust executive leaders are now involving headteachers and other senior leaders in building further capacity by developing a more structured approach to professional dialogue and school-to-school support. Plans to engage headteachers in reviewing the performance of other schools are at an early stage of development.
- The Trust places great emphasis on the need for strong leadership and management in its schools. The chief executive officer has made clear his high expectations of school leaders and takes part in interviews for any school senior leadership post. He rightly challenges practice that does not meet these expectations through consistent performance management processes. The Trust places equal importance on supporting school leaders well. As a consequence, leadership and management are often good or improving in trust schools.
- Recognising that many schools are located in areas where headteacher recruitment is challenging, the chief executive officer is committed to developing school leaders from within schools. Seven headteachers have been promoted from within the Trust. Of the four of these headteachers' schools which have been inspected, Ofsted has judged leadership and management to be good in three. In the fourth, it remained requiring improvement. Headteachers new to the Trust are extremely positive about the training and support they receive.
- Focused review evidence, including that from school inspections, demonstrates that while governance schemes of delegation are clear, the effectiveness with which local governing bodies execute their responsibilities is too variable. Trust executive leaders recognise this and, as a result, have undertaken a review of governance, with the aim of ensuring that the strong practice apparent in some schools is replicated in others. In doing so, the Trust is redressing the balance between local autonomy and central accountability.
- While retaining their own, unique identities, schools are expected to serve their communities by providing an education of the highest quality within the

context of the Trust's principles and expectations. The Trust takes steps to ensure that its inclusive ethos is promoted and celebrated in schools, as pupils learn through a range of creative and spiritual activities. The Trust adds value to schools' curriculum offer through events such as the 'Cathedral Day' and also the 'Purple day', which focuses on health and well-being. Recent inspections identified that pupils in trust schools benefit from curricula that are often rich, balanced and develop pupils well for life in modern Britain.

- The size of schools within the Trust varies from 30 to 460 pupils. Trust executive leaders work alongside headteachers to ensure that appropriate support is put in place for each school. For example, the Trust's financial and human resources provision is tailored to meet the needs of each school. Discussions with headteachers indicate that this expertise from within the Trust is both welcomed and valued.

## **Safeguarding**

Trustees and trust executive leaders place an appropriately high priority on keeping children safe. Consequently, inspection reports confirm that safeguarding is effective in each of the Trust's schools. Trust executive leaders have carried out a thorough audit of each school's child protection procedures to assure themselves that they are effective. Headteachers reported that the Trust follows up any issues raised within this audit on a regular basis. In their view, the Trust is 'absolutely on top of' safeguarding.

The Trust has also tested the impact of schools' procedures on day-to-day practice, including staff awareness of relevant safeguarding policies and processes. Trust executive leaders canvass the views of parents and pupils from each school to assure themselves that pupils feel safe and secure. The Trust has been active in bringing together a range of external agencies in 'team around the school' meetings to offer support where evidence suggests that pupils are at risk or are vulnerable.

## **Recommendations**

- Ensure that outcomes in trust schools continue to improve further for all groups of pupils, including for disadvantaged pupils and most-able pupils.
- Develop the Trust's approach to improving pupil attendance so that the number of pupils persistently absent falls quickly.
- Ensure that the good practice in local governance established in some schools is replicated consistently well in others across the Trust.
- Implement plans to strengthen school-to-school support, including opportunities to share good practice, at all levels, and for headteachers to provide support and challenge for each other.

## Annex: Schools that are part of the Trust

### Trust schools inspected as part of the focused review – section 5 inspections

School	Local Authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Inspection grade, October 2017
Runcton Holme Church of England Primary School	Norfolk	October 2014	Not previously inspected	Inadequate
William de Yaxley Church of England Academy	Peterborough	November 2014	Not previously inspected	Requires improvement
Mepal and Witcham Church of England Primary School	Cambridgeshire	November 2014	Not previously inspected	Good
St Andrews Church of England Primary School	Cambridgeshire	November 2014	Not previously inspected	Good
St Peter's Church of England Aided Junior School	Cambridgeshire	November 2014	Not previously inspected	Requires improvement
Ely St Marys Church of England Primary School	Cambridgeshire	February 2015	Not previously inspected	Good

### Trust school inspected as part of the focused review – section 8 inspection, deemed section 5

School	Local Authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Inspection grade, October 2017
All Saints Academy	Norfolk	October 2014	Not previously inspected	Requires improvement

### Trust schools not inspected as part of the focused review

School	Local Authority	Date opened as an academy	Previous inspection judgement	Most recent inspection judgement
Bury Church of England Primary School	Cambridgeshire	July 2013	Not previously inspected	February 2016 Good
Stanground St Johns Church of England Primary School	Peterborough	July 2013	Not previously inspected	May 2015 Good
Weeting Church of England Primary School	Suffolk	April 2014	Not previously inspected	March 2017 Requires Improvement
Duchy of Lancaster Methwold Church of England Primary School	Norfolk	April 2014	Not previously inspected	March 2017 Good
St Martin At Shouldham Church of England Primary Academy	Norfolk	May 2014	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT

The Norman Church of England Primary School, Northwold	Norfolk	July 2014	Not previously inspected	June 2017 Requires Improvement
Wormegay Church of England Primary School	Norfolk	October 2014	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Anthony Curton Church of England Primary School	Cambridgeshire	March 2015	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Tilney All Saints Church of England Primary School	Norfolk	March 2015	Not previously inspected	October 2017 Good
Marshland St James Primary and Nursery School	Cambridgeshire	September 2015	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
St Mary's Church of England Primary School St Neots	Cambridgeshire	September 2015	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Hilgay Riverside Academy	Norfolk	January 2016	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Ten Mile Bank Riverside Academy	Norfolk	January 2016	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Ermine Street Church Academy	Peterborough	September 2016	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Wisbech St Mary CofE Aided Primary School	Cambridgeshire	September 2016	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Guilden Morden CofE Primary Academy	Cambridgeshire	November 2016	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
St Christopher's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Suffolk	November 2016	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Guyhirn CofE VC Primary School	Cambridgeshire	May 2017	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
Milton Church of England Primary School	Cambridgeshire	June 2017	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT
St John's Church of England Primary School	Cambridgeshire	July 2017	Not previously inspected	Not inspected since joining DEMAT