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Mr Martyn Oliver
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Dear Mr Oliver

Summary evaluation of Outwood Grange Academies Trust

Following the summary evaluation of Outwood Grange Academies Trust (or 'the Trust') in May 2019, 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 our visit to the Trust on 20–23 May 2019. Please pass on our thanks to the staff, pupils and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

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

Summary of main findings

- The CEO and executive leaders model strong and principled leadership and an unwavering determination to provide the best quality of education for pupils. This clarity of vision and purpose is shared by leaders and staff across the Trust.
- The Trust's 'transformation model' for school improvement has been developed and refined over a number of years. Leaders' rigorous implementation of this approach has enabled the Trust to secure rapid improvements in many of its schools, including in a number of schools which underperformed significantly prior to joining the Trust.
- The Trust's executive leaders, including the CEO, have their fingers on the pulse of every school. Well-developed systems capture an accurate view of the quality of education across the Trust, allowing leaders to take efficient and effective action where it is most needed. The impact of the Trust's work is evident in the strongly improving outcomes for pupils overall, over time.

- Support and challenge from the Trust's team of subject directors have been instrumental in transforming the quality of teaching and in developing the curriculum across the Trust. This has led to improvements in pupils' outcomes in a wide range of subjects.
- Clear strategic direction and careful resource-management by the trustees and the CEO have enabled the Trust to grow sustainably. The organisational development work, led by the current CEO, has allowed the Trust to support schools new to the Trust, while continuing to improve the overall effectiveness of a number of their existing schools.
- There is a high level of consistency across the Trust in aspects of the curriculum, policies, systems and structures adopted by schools. This has enabled frequent opportunities for staff to develop and share practice meaningfully. Working together in this way has fostered a culture of collaboration, rather than competition, across Trust schools.
- School leaders are heavily invested in the success of the Trust. They play an important role in shaping the policies and procedures in place across the Trust. Senior and middle leaders relish the opportunities to innovate and share practice, so that the best ideas are never locked up in one school.
- Staff report that they feel supported and valued. Talent is identified early and nurtured. Well-considered professional development provided by the Trust, including through the Outwood Institute of Education (IoE), has made a significant contribution to improving the effectiveness of schools. Leadership is good or better in every school that has been inspected as part of the Trust.
- The Trust's support for finance, human resources and facilities management is highly effective. School principals are full of praise for the Trust-wide systems that free them to focus on improving the quality of education for pupils.
- High-quality challenge and support for schools have ensured that the attainment of disadvantaged pupils has improved significantly over time. However, the Trust's own priorities reflect, correctly, that there is more to do to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils nationally.
- Pupils' attendance across the Trust's primary schools is improving. However, the Trust's strategy to improve attendance has not been implemented consistently well across secondary schools. Consequently, the absence and persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and secondary-age pupils remain too high.
- Over the past 18 months, leaders have changed their approach to the management of pupils' behaviour across Trust schools. Pupils' behaviour is improving and the use of fixed-term exclusions has reduced notably across the Trust. Nevertheless, the behaviour of pupils is not consistently good and the proportion of pupils being excluded for a fixed period remains high across secondary schools.

Range of evidence

The inspection team considered 10 inspections of the Trust's schools, which were conducted between November 2018 and April 2019. All of these inspections were carried out under either section 5 or 8 of the Education Act 2005 (the Act), as amended.

- In the seven inspections conducted under section 5 of the Education Act, one school improved from good to outstanding, one school was judged to remain good and five schools improved from requires improvement to good.
- In one section 8 short inspection, inspectors confirmed that the school remained good.
- In a section 8 inspection with no formal designation, leaders were judged to be taking effective action.
- In a section 8 inspection of an exempt outstanding school, the inspection was deemed a section 5 inspection. The school's overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement.

During the on-site visit to the Trust in May 2019, inspectors visited eight schools and held meetings with principals, middle leaders, chairs and/or representatives of the academy councils, groups of staff and pupils. Telephone discussions were held with the principals of the 13 other schools in the Trust and the head of the Trust's 'Post-16 Centre' in Worksop.

During the on-site visit, discussions were held with you and other senior and operational staff from the Trust, including the executive leadership team and executive and senior subject directors. Inspectors also met with trustees and members. Telephone discussions took place with officers from two local authorities to discuss the Trust's work. A range of relevant documentation was also scrutinised.

Context

- Outwood Grange Academies Trust was established in 2009, initially comprising two secondary schools. Between September 2011 and August 2016, 17 schools joined the Trust. The Trust grew by a further 11 schools between September 2016 and August 2018; six of these schools were re-brokered from the Wakefield City Academies Trust. One school joined the Trust in 2018/19.
- The Trust currently comprises 31 schools, providing education for more than 23,000 pupils and employing 3,660 staff, some of whom work part time. The Trust's schools span two Ofsted regions and 11 local authorities.
- Ten schools offer education to primary-age pupils, including one junior school. The Trust runs 21 secondary schools. Twenty-three of the Trust's schools are sponsor-led academies. Eight schools are academy converters.
- The Trust has a track record of sponsoring schools that were previously judged inadequate. Eight schools that were previously judged to be

inadequate prior to being sponsored by the Trust (or re-brokered from another trust) have been inspected since joining the Trust. All of these schools are now at least good; two are judged to be outstanding.

- Across the Trust, 36% of pupils are disadvantaged compared to 26% nationally. The proportion of pupils in receipt of support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is broadly in line with the national average.
- The Trust's secondary schools are designated into three regional groups to facilitate school-improvement arrangements.
- The Trust has six schools designated as teaching schools. One school is a designated English Hub. The Trust also leads the Yorkshire and Humber Maths Hub.
- The Trust offers training and professional development for staff, school-direct initial teacher training and a range of leadership qualifications through the Outwood IoE, which is based at Outwood Academy Adwick and Outwood Academy Acklam.
- The Trust board delegates responsibilities for some aspects of governance to local committees known as 'academy councils'.
- In 2015, a new CEO (designate) was appointed from within the Trust. He took over the role fully in 2016.

Inspection outcomes

Currently, the inspection outcomes for the Trust's schools, including the most recent inspections carried out as part of this evaluation, are as follows:

- Seven schools have been judged to be outstanding since they joined the Trust. Six of these judgements represent an improvement on the previous overall effectiveness grade.
- One school was judged to be outstanding prior to joining the Trust and is exempt from routine inspection.
- Thirteen schools have been judged to be good since they joined the Trust. Eleven of these judgements represent an improvement on the previous overall effectiveness grade.
- One school has been judged to require improvement since joining the Trust.
- Nine schools joined the Trust more recently and are yet to be inspected. Of these, three of their predecessor schools were judged inadequate, five to require improvement and one was good when last inspected.

Main findings

- Throughout the Trust, leaders and staff articulate the highest ambitions for pupils and for the performance of schools. The Trust's plans and actions reflect the

expectation that every school will offer an outstanding quality of education to pupils. Despite this, trustees have not hesitated to welcome a number of schools into the Trust where: pupils' achievement has been weak over time; behaviour and attendance have not been well managed; and leadership has not previously had sufficient capacity to improve the school. The decision to accept a school into the Trust is motivated by the CEO's and trustees' firmly held belief that 'every child deserves the best'.

- The Trust's team of executive leaders, who are highly respected by school leaders, have carefully honed the 'transformation model' of school improvement. This is implemented rapidly when a school joins the Trust. Exceptionally rigorous due diligence checks result in a thorough and precise plan to ensure that the right support and resources are provided to help the school to improve quickly. The impact of this work is striking. Eight schools that were inadequate when they joined the Trust have rapidly improved. Six are now judged to be good and two are now outstanding schools. The principals of schools that are yet to be inspected confirm that they receive high-quality support and challenge from the Trust to help them improve their schools.
- A sophisticated system is in place within the Trust to capture timely information which covers all aspects of a school's performance. This is routinely used by principals and academy councils to monitor and report on the school's successes and priorities. Trustees, the CEO and executive leaders make effective use of this information on a very regular basis to challenge leaders and to deploy bespoke support to address the needs of each school. This highly individualised and responsive approach to ongoing support for each school has made a strong contribution to the improvements in the quality of education across the Trust. Consequently, in key measures in English and mathematics, overall, across the Trust, pupils from early years through to key stage 4 now achieve at least in line with the national averages and often do better. For example, the proportion of pupils across the Trust attaining a standard pass in both GCSE English and mathematics at the end of Year 11 in 2018 was well above the national average. This represents a significant improvement in pupils' attainment over time.
- Consistency in many of the structures, systems and procedures in place across schools has enabled more opportunities for collaborative working. For example, because Trust schools have chosen to follow the same curriculum for English, all teachers of English have benefited from shared professional development days to improve their subject knowledge. This culture of working together has developed a shared purpose among staff. They describe themselves as an 'Outwood family', where pupils are at the centre of their decision-making. Staff are genuinely concerned to ensure that every pupil in every school across the Trust is given the best chance to succeed. It is not uncommon for staff to put the needs of pupils in another school before their own, recognising where the need is greatest across the Trust.
- School leaders speak highly of the systems in place across the Trust to manage human resources, finances and estates. Most cited the freedom this offered them,

reducing any distractions from their efforts to improve the quality of the curriculum, teaching and pupils' outcomes.

- School leaders and staff are effusive in their praise for the extensive team of directors, who provide support for specific subjects and aspects of education across the Trust. As well as setting the direction for the curriculum, subject directors provide coaching for middle leaders and teaching staff and are often found leading by example, teaching classes and supporting groups of pupils. The work of this team of directors has been instrumental in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes across a range of subjects. In mathematics, for example, pupils' attainment is now above the national average at each key stage. In modern foreign languages, the standards attained by pupils across the Trust at the end of key stage 4 have risen sharply over time. The proportion of pupils studying a language at GCSE has doubled in three years and is above the national average.
- An extensive curriculum review, involving staff from schools across the Trust, has resulted in a knowledge-rich curriculum model which extends from early years to post-16. This matches the demands of the national curriculum at relevant key stages. While there is a Trust-wide expectation of the knowledge and understanding that is required in each subject, there is also autonomy for subject leaders and teachers to adapt schemes of learning to meet the needs of pupils in each school. Trust leaders are ambitious for the academic achievement of pupils in a wide range of subjects. A higher-than-average proportion of pupils study humanities, the arts and languages at key stage 4. Year-on-year, the proportion of pupils studying the EBacc is increasing.
- Leaders constantly seek opportunities to enhance the impact of the curriculum. They are never complacent, even where published outcomes appear strong. For example, Trust leaders recognised that, while attainment in phonics across key stage 1 was above the national average, the development of early reading was not securing the fluency that was necessary to ensure that every pupil could access the curriculum successfully. Leaders have implemented a new approach to teaching reading, underpinned by training for staff, which supports the Trust's intent that every pupil will become a fluent and confident reader by the end of key stage 1.
- Trust leaders have appropriate ambitions for the most vulnerable pupils. Actions to strengthen the systems of support for those who need it most, including pupils with SEND, are paying dividends. Recent inspections of schools reflect improving outcomes for pupils with SEND. Disadvantaged pupils now attain at least in line with disadvantaged pupils nationally and often do better. This is a much-improved position over time. However, continuing to reduce differences so that disadvantaged pupils attain as well as other pupils nationally remains an ongoing priority for the Trust.
- Leaders at every level play a pivotal role in realising the Trust's ambition to grow 'capacity in advance of need' by identifying staff who may have leadership

potential and working with the Outwood IoE to provide the right professional development. Newly qualified teachers speak enthusiastically about the chances they are given to dip their toes into leadership projects. More experienced staff highlight the chances to 'try out' a temporary senior leadership role and to gain professional qualifications to support their journey to leadership. Aspiring and newly appointed principals are supported extensively by executive leaders. This systematic approach to leadership development is not left to chance. The impact of the Trust's work to build leadership capacity is reflected in inspection outcomes. In each of the 21 schools inspected as part of the Trust, leadership and management are judged to be good or outstanding.

- Leaders are passionate about reducing workload for teaching staff. Decisive action has been taken across the Trust to achieve this. For example, directed time for teachers is 50 hours below the annual limit set nationally in the 'School teachers' pay and conditions document'. Trust-wide decisions are carefully considered to evaluate the impact on workload. Staff indicated, to inspectors, that new policies and procedures are based on sound research and never on a whim or simply to follow the latest 'trend' in education. Staff report that morale is high across the Trust and this is reflected in a survey of teachers conducted by the Trust in the past 12 months and in the findings of recent inspections. A number of leaders described to inspectors that working for Outwood Grange Academies Trust had re-energised them and had ensured that they were more likely to stay in the teaching profession.
- Despite the high level of consistency in some aspects of Trust schools' work, principals and other leaders are empowered to adapt policies and the curriculum to their local context. Subject leaders cited a number of occasions when they were supported by the Trust to offer a different qualification option to better suit their pupils. In one of the Trust's academies in South Yorkshire, the work of leaders to adapt the Trust's behaviour policy to meet the needs of their pupils has resulted in much-improved behaviour and, consequently, a significant reduction in the need to use exclusions. The local authority confirmed to inspectors that the school's work is helping to inform inclusion practice across the area and that the school's fixed-term exclusions are currently among the lowest in the local area. Trust leaders encourage and embrace this type of innovation in individual schools and use it to inform the development of Trust-wide policy.
- Over the past 18 months, significant changes have taken place to improve the behaviour management arrangements across Trust schools. Evidence from recent inspections and discussions with staff, pupils and academy councils during the on-site visits confirm that pupils' behaviour is improving as a result of the Trust's work, allowing more pupils to concentrate on their learning. However, while fixed-term exclusions have reduced by a notable 29% in the past 12 months, they remain well above average overall across the secondary phase of the Trust. Inspections undertaken as part of the first stage of this summary evaluation reflect that leaders are taking robust action to tackle behaviour issues and reduce the use of exclusions and the consequences room. Nevertheless, behaviour, while improving, is not consistently good in a number of Trust secondary schools.

Leaders remain focused on reducing the behaviours that are leading to the use of the consequences room or to fixed-term exclusions. Executive leaders have drawn on the strongest practice across the Trust, capturing what is most effective, to develop the latest iteration of the Trust's behaviour policy. This has been trialled and is due for full implementation in September 2019.

- Actions to improve pupils' attendance have had some success across the Trust's primary schools. In those primary schools which have been part of the Trust for more than three years, attendance overall has improved notably and is now above the national average in four of the five schools. However, the strategy to reduce absence has not been implemented consistently well across all Trust schools. Consequently, despite some improvements, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains below national averages across the primary and secondary phase. Similarly, while acknowledging that absence rates were high in a number of secondary schools at the point at which they joined the Trust, improvements in attendance have been limited. Pupils' absence and persistent absence remain above average across secondary schools.
- Trustees set a clear direction for the work of the executive leaders and this has been underpinned by sound, strategic decisions to ensure that the Trust's growth has been sustainable. Trustees sought, when they appointed the current CEO, an officer who could build capacity in the Trust while maintaining their high expectations for the quality of education. The CEO has done just that. Work on organisational development has ensured that, while the Trust continues to fulfil trustees' ambition to sponsor some of the most vulnerable schools, the infrastructure is in place to maintain the strong track record of improvement that is now a feature of the Trust's work. For example, the Trust's model for curriculum-led financial planning has enabled efficient use of resources, ensuring that the right support is available to schools at the right times.

Safeguarding

The Trust's oversight of safeguarding arrangements is effective. Trust leaders provide academy councils with detailed guidance that enables nominated link governors to monitor safeguarding procedures in each school. Minutes of the meetings of academy councils are routinely presented to the Trust board. This ensures that Trust leaders are well informed about the safeguarding arrangements in each school.

Detailed information on safeguarding is collected routinely from every school. Trust leaders use this to analyse trends and determine the support that is provided. The Trust's safeguarding leaders have appropriate links with local area safeguarding teams, ensuring that the Trust's policies, training and procedures are shaped by an effective understanding of local and national agendas. The Trust's curriculum for personal development provides pupils with regular opportunities to learn to stay safe. This curriculum is adapted appropriately by school leaders to reflect the differing contexts in which they work and to take account of local risks.

Trustees discuss safeguarding regularly. They make good use of the detailed information available to them to challenge Trust leaders where risks are identified. For example, Trust-wide analysis of safeguarding concerns highlighted a rising number of pupils requiring support with their mental health. Trustees were swift to ensure that leaders reviewed provision and have enhanced the help available to pupils.

Recommendations

- Continue to improve pupils' behaviour so that the proportion of fixed-term exclusions further reduces across the Trust's secondary schools.
- Ensure that the Trust's strategy to reduce absence and persistent absence is implemented consistently across all schools so that a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those in secondary schools attend well.
- Continue the Trust's work to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils so that they achieve at least in line with other pupils nationally.

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Academies that are part of the Trust

Schools inspected as part of the batched inspections – section 5:

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Primary Academy Darfield	Barnsley	May 2016	Predecessor school: Requires Improvement	November 2018: Good
Outwood Academy Danum	Doncaster	September 2016	Predecessor school: Requires Improvement	November 2018: Good
Outwood Primary Academy Littleworth Grange	Barnsley	May 2016	Predecessor school: Requires Improvement	December 2018: Good
Outwood Academy Carlton	Barnsley	February 2016	Predecessor school: Good	January 2019: Good
Outwood Academy Bishopsgarth	Stockton-on-Tees	November 2016	Predecessor school: Requires Improvement	January 2019: Good

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Academy City	Sheffield	January 2014	Predecessor school: Inadequate September 2016: Requires Improvement	February 2019: Good
Outwood Primary Academy Ledger Lane	Wakefield	December 2012	Predecessor school: Satisfactory May 2014: Good	April 2019: Outstanding

Trust schools inspected as part of the batched inspections – section 8

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Academy Brumby	North Lincolnshire	April 2013	Predecessor school: Inadequate March 2015: Good	November 2018: Confirmed as remaining good
Outwood Academy Acklam	Middlesbrough	September 2013	Predecessor school: Inadequate April 2015: Good	January 2019: Leaders taking effective action.

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Academy Adwick	Doncaster	September 2009	Predecessor school: Satisfactory February 2016: Outstanding	March 2019: Requires improvement

Other Trust schools:

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Grange Academy	Wakefield	September 2009	Predecessor school: Outstanding	February 2012: Outstanding
Outwood Academy Ripon	North Yorkshire	September 2011	Predecessor school: Satisfactory March 2012: Good	January 2016: Outstanding
Outwood Academy Valley	Nottinghamshire	June 2012	Predecessor school: Good March 2014: Good	May 2017: Outstanding

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Academy Portland	Nottinghamshire	June 2012	Prior to being rebrokered into the Trust: Satisfactory March 2014: Outstanding	March 2019: Leaders taking effective action
Outwood Primary Academy Kirkhamgate	Wakefield	March 2013	Predecessor school: Inadequate	September 2014: Outstanding
Outwood Primary Academy Lofthouse Gate	Wakefield	September 2013	Predecessor school: Good	June 2016: Good
Outwood Academy Foxhills	North Lincolnshire	September 2014	Prior to being rebrokered into the Trust: Inadequate	January 2016: Good
Outwood Academy Newbold	Derbyshire	January 2015	Predecessor school: Inadequate	November 2017: Good
Outwood Academy Bydales	Redcar and Cleveland	February 2015	Predecessor school: Inadequate	January 2018: Outstanding

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Academy Shafton	Barnsley	March 2015	Predecessor school: Requires improvement	January 2018: Good
Outwood Academy Ormesby	Middlesbrough	September 2015	Prior to being rebrokered into the Trust: Inadequate	May 2017: Good
Outwood Academy Redcar	Redcar and Cleveland	October 2017	Predecessor school: Requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT
Outwood Primary Academy Greystone	North Yorkshire	January 2018	Predecessor school: Inadequate	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT
Outwood Academy Easingwold	North Yorkshire	April 2018	Predecessor school: Inadequate	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT
Outwood Primary Academy Park Hill	Wakefield	April 2018	Predecessor school: Requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT

School	Local authority	Date of joining the MAT	Previous inspection judgement/s	Most recent inspection grade
Outwood Primary Academy Bell Lane	Wakefield	April 2018	Predecessor school: Good	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT
Outwood Academy Freeston	Wakefield	May 2018	Predecessor school: Requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT
Outwood Academy Hemsworth	Wakefield	May 2018	Predecessor school: Requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT
Outwood Primary Academy Newstead Green	Wakefield	May 2018	Predecessor school: Requires improvement	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT
Outwood Academy City Fields	Wakefield	July 2018	Predecessor school: Outstanding	Exempt from routine inspections
Outwood Junior Academy Brumby	North Lincolnshire	September 2018	Predecessor school: Inadequate	Not yet inspected as part of the MAT