



Department
for Education

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Claire Blamey
Chair
East Anglia Schools Trust
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10th June 2016

Dear Ms Blamey

As you know, Harmer Parr visited Cliff Park Infant and Junior schools on my behalf on 6th June. We believe that it is important to understand what is happening in schools rather than simply rely on published data.

The regional office of the Department for Education has four priorities, namely to:

- develop the capacity of multi-academy trusts to support others;
- support and challenge underperforming academies;
- increase the number of free schools;
- encourage greater collaboration to develop a self-improving school-led system.

A crucial part of the RSC role is to hold academy trusts to account for the performance of their schools. Our Education Advisers made over 200 visits to academies last year and gained a strong understanding of the individual issues each school faces and the actions being taken to improve outcomes for pupils. Visits are generally for half a day or less and aim not to be a burden on a school.

Harmer met with the Executive Headteacher, the Heads of both schools, the Lead for teaching and learning and representatives of the Local Governing Body and the Trust Board. He also had a tour of both schools and met a group of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils.

The schools became academies in 2013, when the junior school went into special measures. It was felt that the stronger infant school had the capacity to sponsor and support it in its recovery. A subsequent inspection in 2015 removed special measures, acknowledged that the school was moving in the right direction but judged that it still required improvement. Since then, two

Ofsted monitoring visits have found that progress has continued, with teaching, leadership and governance all improving.

Harmer first toured the Junior School. While it was clear that it was still a 'work in progress', pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good and the teaching was lively and interesting. The pupils were busy, clearly enjoying what they were doing. It was good to see that writing - one of the weaknesses mentioned in the inspection reports and suggested by the data - was being extended across the curriculum, with opportunities to write created by lively topic work. As a result, some well-presented and engaging extended writing was on show.

Recruitment and retention of teachers in this area are historically difficult, and the school has experienced a considerable turnover in recent years. It has also had to deal with unexpected illness and absence, and as a result teaching is not yet uniformly strong. However, the risk of teaching that is less than good has been substantially reduced as a result of strong support and professional development. Harmer mentioned the possibility of using some of the resources of the expanding trust to create additional and perhaps supernumerary teaching capacity, to allow it to deal with problems and contingencies 'in house'.

Harmer's meeting with the pupils turned out to be most encouraging. This articulate and perceptive group felt that the school had improved noticeably in the last two years. In particular, they said the level of challenge was much higher, and they appreciated it. They reported that the work was interesting and the assessment and marking were helpful. They showed Harmer examples of their work and spoke with pride about what they had done and how the teachers' comments helped them to improve. They struggled to say what the school could improve, eventually expressing the opinion that the younger pupils were sometimes a bit noisy. "Ah yes", replied one girl, "but remember: we were like that once".

Harmer reported that the Infant School was, in his view, securely good with aspects that are outstanding. The Reception classes had a wide range of activities both indoors and outside, with busy pupils responding well to the interesting challenges. There were extensive displays of pupils' work, with some high-quality writing. The classrooms were stimulating and well organised. In one Year 1 class, pupils on the carpet listened and responded with rapt attention, both enjoying and learning from the activity led by the teacher. In short, the strength of the Infant School was clear and well established. Its somewhat labyrinthine layout creates a number of interesting and well-used areas. It is a rather engaging Aladdin's Cave.

The Trust has thought hard about the best operating model, and the structure is clear. The educational expertise on the governing body and the board of directors is well used to hold the headteachers to account. The Trust hopes to sponsor another school in the near future, and is considering the implications of further expansion. This is an aspect that will repay further thought. Harmer also suggested ways of making sure that the impact on pupils of leadership and governance is captured and recorded.

Harmer felt that the Infant School's sponsorship of the Junior had led to steady rather than spectacular improvement. This in itself is a strong achievement, given the difficulties and obstacles that have been overcome. The Junior School now seems well placed for a favourable inspection judgement next time round. It feels that its predictions for SATs results this summer suggest performance broadly in line with the expected national standards. It has taken strong steps to ensure that the judgements it is making are robust, and in line with those of other schools.

In summary, Harmer was reassured that the partnership between the two schools has been very beneficial, and that there is further potential to be developed as the Trust expands.

We know that the work of academy trustees, school leaders and teachers is very demanding, and that you do this work in the belief that the pupils deserve the best education possible. We are pleased to be working with you in this important venture.

If Harmer can be of further assistance please feel free to contact him directly:
Harmer.PARR@education.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



Tim Coulson
**Regional Schools Commissioner, East of England and North East
London**

cc Suzanne Mitchell, Executive Headteacher

cc Phil Reid, Headteacher, Cliff Park Infant School

cc Louise Watkins, Headteacher, Cliff Park Junior School

