



Education Committee

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Lord Agnew
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Dear Lord Agnew,

Thank you for attending the Committee's session on 5 December. I hope you have returned from the Christmas recess ready to take on the opportunities of your new role.

Although we recognise that most academies are performing well, and acknowledge the strengths of the multi-academy trust system, we have concerns over a lack of transparency and accountability.

Firstly, it seems to us that parents, staff and students are in the dark over who is running their schools and that decisions are being taken behind closed doors. Parents seemed to be the last people to know about the imminent collapse of Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT), for example, and parents are the last to know about the re-brokering or preferred sponsor for a school in other cases. This lack of transparency is particularly evident in the relationship between regional schools commissioners (RSCs), Ofsted and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). We believe that the overlap between these three tiers of accountability is a major cause of confusion.

Recent cases, such as the collapse of WCAT, show the lack of joined-up accountability in the school system. It became clear during our recent hearing that very serious and major concerns about the viability of WCAT were known by the DfE and RSCs in September 2016, yet significant and unwarranted transfers of assets were still able to be made between this date and the trust's ultimate collapse. We believe that a more robust system of oversight could have prevented this. We are particularly concerned by the extent to which failing trusts are stripping assets from their schools. It is not clear to us that all schools are benefitting from joining MATs, or that trusts are providing value for money.

It seemed that the Department's view on whether Ofsted should conduct full inspections of trusts is shifting and that Ofsted may eventually take on this role. In order to bring greater transparency to the system immediately and provide more information to all interested parties, we suggest that RSCs start to publish scorecards for trusts, combining financial and performance information in a single location which they transparently use to determine the suitability of a trust taking over a school.

These scorecards could complement the growth checks which our predecessor Committee were told would be in place for all trusts from 2017. We encourage you to develop a way of communicating the performance of trusts to improve the information publicly available on MATs in a way which is accessible for parents.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Committee