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Chris Stevens
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Dear Chris Stevens

Short inspection of Fairfax

Following my visit to the academy on 12 January 2016 with Rob Hackfath HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2011.

Since the last inspection, the school has become an academy and is the founder member of the Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. Your previous leadership experience at Fairfax and within the Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust (FMAT) has ensured a smooth transition in leadership. You have quickly had a positive impact on improving the academy. You are very clear about why it is not yet outstanding and you are using your experience and the good capacity of leaders to further improve the good quality of education in the academy.

The previous inspection report judged the school to be good with some outstanding features. Outstanding features identified in that report included pupils' behaviour, their attendance and how well pupils contribute to the school and the wider community. These features remain of very high quality in the academy.

The previous report also directed the school to improve the overall quality of teaching so that it was as consistently good at Key Stage 3 as at other key stages and that it challenged pupils more effectively. In addition, leaders were recommended to ensure that the monitoring of the quality of provision had greater impact and that the role of middle leaders was extended in relation to their responsibilities for the quality of teaching and learning. Since the last inspection, leaders in the academy have addressed each of these areas effectively so that none now remain as areas for improvement. For example, teaching at Key Stage 3 is now

judged by you to be of the same high quality as in other key stages as a result of rigorous monitoring and effective coaching. As a result of these and other improvements, most current pupils in most subjects across all key stages are making good progress.

You and your team are ensuring that the culture of high expectations about achievement, the exemplary behaviour of pupils and the strong community spirit, all noted in the previous inspection report, are maintained and permeate the ethos and culture of the academy. Pupils are proud of their contribution to a wide range of school events including performing arts and sporting activities. They told us that they relish the competitive element provided by the well-established house system. The additions of colours and badges to the academy's uniform are worn with pride, including by sixth formers, and encourage a high level of participation by pupils.

The curriculum across all key stages offers a broad and balanced experience for pupils. It includes an excellent range of physical and artistic opportunities. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects, including the promotion of fundamental British values, an understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example in relation to e-safety, and the development of strong work-related skills is built into, and threaded through, the curriculum via assemblies, form time, enrichment days, and subjects. As a result, most students leave Fairfax very well prepared for their next steps and for taking their place in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and meet all statutory requirements. Appropriate, frequent and up-to-date training, including 'Prevent' training, ensures staff and academy associates (governors) are well versed in their responsibility to ensure that pupils are safe and well-looked-after. As a result, leaders and staff understand what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's safety or welfare. Academy records show that when staff have had cause to act, they have done so in a proportionate and timely manner. Key leaders make appropriate use of other agencies and organisations in response to concerns. Parents express high levels of confidence in the academy's work to keep everyone safe.

As indicated above, safeguarding and related issues are carefully threaded through the curriculum to ensure pupils are fully aware of how to keep themselves safe. The academy works hard, and successfully, to ensure that pupils are taught to respect views, cultures, ethnicities, lifestyles and faiths that are different to their own.

Inspection findings

- The academy's self-evaluation is exemplary in its accuracy, focus on key priorities and succinctness. Its judgements indicate the clear view leaders have of how well the academy is doing and what needs to improve further in order for it to become outstanding.

- Increasingly effective and well-structured monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now in place. Monitoring is supplemented with prompt and personalised support to improve any teaching that is judged as 'not yet good'. Academy records indicate that this is effective in bringing about improvements to the quality of teaching. As a result, almost all teaching is now at least consistently good across all key stages.
- Leaders are beginning to act more promptly in reviewing and revising strategies that are not having the expected impact. For example, some strategies supporting disadvantaged pupils, although popular with pupils, were found to have little impact on improving outcomes. New and more effective strategies have been introduced as a consequence.
- Members of the academy association (the equivalent of a local governing body) are totally committed to maintaining the strengths of the academy and its culture and ethos. They receive good training and are increasingly well informed about the performance of the academy. This is enabling members of the association to challenge school leaders more effectively, as is evident in the minutes of recent academy association meetings.
- Academy records indicate that pupils consistently demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and that time in lessons is used productively. Records also indicate that effort and commitment by pupils is consistently high. In the lessons observed during our visit, pupils were fully engaged because teachers provided work that challenged them to achieve well and make the progress they are capable of. You and your leadership team are placing more emphasis on the quality of marking and feedback and the contribution this makes to good teaching and learning. As a result, teachers now provide valuable feedback that helps pupils improve their work and the progress they make in learning.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the academy is exemplary and strategies that have been introduced recently, such as the banning of mobile phones, a shortened lunch break and same-day detentions further enhance this. Rates of exclusion of pupils from the academy are usually low, but increased during the autumn term in 2015. This rise coincided with the new rules. Monitoring of pupils' behaviour indicated that they were accepting the new rules towards the end of the autumn term and, as a result, exclusion rates began to fall.
- Attendance is high for most groups of pupils. However, absence rates are high for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders can identify legitimate causes of absence for some pupils, particularly those with medical needs, and are working well with the families of other pupils to improve their attendance.

- The standards achieved by pupils who join the academy in Year 7 are generally above average and this is reflected in the above average standards they reach at GCSE. The proportion of pupils who achieved the English Baccalaureate at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 was significantly higher than the national average. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils gaining the English Baccalaureate was much lower.
- In 2015, about two thirds of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 made at least the progress they should and more than one quarter made much better progress – the result of consistently good teaching in English and mathematics. However, only half of disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 made the progress they should. Progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs is in line with expectations.
- The educational needs of pupils with low starting points are well met through the 'accelerated progress' group. Pupils in this group follow a curriculum with an increased focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills. Leaders were able to evidence the good rates of progress these pupils make.
- In 2015, the progress of sixth formers exceeded the national average in academic qualifications and was in line with the national average for vocational qualifications. Recently, academy leaders have changed provision in the sixth form so that it is now focused on a wide range of academic qualifications. Those learners who wish to pursue vocational courses in the sixth form are fully supported in their applications to other local educational institutions that provide these courses.
- Sixth formers, who are excellent role models for younger pupils, speak very positively about the opportunities they have for taking on leadership responsibilities and for the opportunities they get to extend and enhance their curriculum vitae (CVs) with extra-curricular and work-related opportunities. They spoke highly of the effective careers information, advice and guidance they receive. While a majority of sixth formers go on to higher education, good advice and guidance, for example about apprenticeship options, ensure those with more practical aspirations are well supported.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is closed and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improved, by:

- more detailed and frequent evaluation of the impact of strategies used to support the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- taking prompt action when strategies to support disadvantaged pupils are judged to be less effective.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Academy Association, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met you and other senior leaders, two members of the academy association, including its Chair, and the chief executive officer of the FMAT. Pupils gave inspectors their views on the school when they spoke to us in lessons and at lunchtime and inspectors met with groups of sixth formers. We joined you and a deputy headteacher in short visits to lessons where we reviewed the quality of pupils' work. The 103 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, were considered, as well as the 18 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and the 99 responses to the online staff questionnaire. Inspectors evaluated recent information on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour, and scrutinised other records about the monitoring of teaching and learning, keeping pupils safe and minutes of the academy association's meetings.