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Dr Caroline Badyal
Chief Executive Officer
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Dear Dr Badyal

Short inspection of Q3 Academy

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2017 with Gwen Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Despite a higher than usual turnover of leaders and teaching staff, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have recruited a new, effective senior leadership team and made wide-ranging changes to teaching and assessment. Your leadership team is honest and transparent about where weaknesses exist and has effective plans in place to improve the school further. This team has the capacity and ambition to move the school forward.

The changes you have made to the leadership structures, assessment systems, progress tracking and analysis of assessment information are now having a very positive impact on pupils' progress across all year groups and most subjects. You have placed a greater emphasis on the accountability of middle leaders.

Leaders at all levels share an understanding of the main barriers to disadvantaged pupils' progress. The extra funding for these pupils is spent wisely and is effectively addressing these barriers. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils' progress across all year groups is improving towards that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

The previous inspection report identified the need to improve teaching and learning, particularly in science. You have tackled this area very effectively.

Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection. Relationships between teachers and pupils are extremely strong and this means that in lessons, pupils work hard, showing respect for one another and their teachers. Teachers carefully match work to pupils' starting points and pupils are appropriately challenged in lessons. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' conduct and standard of work. This means that pupils' behaviour in lessons is consistently positive and their books show that they take pride in their work. Underpinning these developments in teaching are high aspirations for pupils' progress that are shared by all leaders and teachers. Teachers talk regularly with pupils about these aspirations, so pupils feel able to tackle challenges and aspire to exceed their targets. As one pupil commented, '...teachers give you that push and really support you to get high grades'.

You have made changes to the curriculum for Years 7 to 10 and these changes are having a positive impact on progress for these pupils. The new curriculum has clear pathways that are appropriate for the different aspirations and ability levels of a range of pupils. This means more pupils will have access to the English Baccalaureate. Pupils will also enter Year 9 with stronger knowledge and skills in humanities subjects and they will develop their literacy and numeracy skills more systematically across the curriculum.

The tracking system you have designed for all pupils is a particular strength. It is accurate, easy to understand and allows leaders to quickly pinpoint where intervention is needed.

You have also made changes to those interventions that help when pupils fall behind. Through the school's analysis of information about the progress of different groups, leaders quickly identify any who begin to fall behind. Pastoral leaders then carefully evaluate their needs. Leaders' support for these pupils is then very closely matched to each pupil's unique circumstances. Interventions are now a core part of the timetable, are better supported by parents and are well attended by pupils. They are having a positive impact on pupils' progress but changes have been too recent to judge whether all new strategies are effectively embedded throughout the school.

Retention of students in the sixth form, while improving, is still too low. Leaders recognise this and have already made significant changes to advice and guidance for Year 11 pupils. As a result, more students are on the appropriate courses for their aspirations and abilities, and are more prepared to complete them.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The leaders responsible for safeguarding, and the team that supports them, work together closely to keep pupils safe. Any issues that arise are dealt with quickly and efficiently and record-keeping is robust.

Leaders have ensured that all staff are appropriately trained and a designated

person for safeguarding is always available while the school is open. When pupils are absent, leaders follow this up very quickly with home visits. Consequently, attendance for all pupils, and particularly for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils, is improving.

Through assemblies and the tutorial programme, leaders have ensured that they help pupils to understand and manage the risks they might face. Pupils have a good understanding of these risks and discussed them with inspectors. Pupils say that they feel safe in school, and that bullying is very rare and dealt with quickly and effectively if it does happen.

Inspection findings

- The sponsor and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are well informed about pupils' experiences in the school. They share the aspirations and values of senior staff and give expert support to the school to reach its long-term strategic goals. Governors hold school leaders to account for the performance of the school and gather information independently through governor visits and external audits to ensure that they have an objective view.
- Leaders have changed the curriculum so that it supports all pupils to make better progress. For example, all pupils on options courses in Years 10 and 12 have a three-week 'taster' to make sure that the courses are appropriate for them, with an opportunity to change courses if needed. Consequently, pupils are fully committed to their courses and are increasingly successful. Subject leaders have developed skills and knowledge maps so the curriculum at key stage 3 is carefully designed to lead into key stage 4. As a result, progress at key stage 4 is improving.
- In lessons and around the school site, pupils behave very respectfully towards one another and staff. All staff have high expectations and use the rewards and sanctions system consistently to support good behaviour.
- School leaders have developed a strong curriculum for the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils. They have identified where, in subjects, these elements can be developed, and they have also implemented a discrete set of opportunities for pupils' development. Pupils have a strong understanding of fundamental British values and take a full part in debates on topics of national and international importance. Pupils have regular, structured opportunities to be reflective, consider their beliefs and those of others, take part in charity events and contribute to their community.
- Pupils' attendance is above the national average. Pupils enjoy school and their attendance reflects this. Some groups of pupils, however, have lower attendance. School leaders are implementing effective strategies to improve their attendance, but these have not been in place long. Strategies include first-day phone calls and second-day home visits, a school minibus run and personal home visits from senior staff for pupils who are persistently absent. Although still needing attention, absence and persistent absence is reducing for these groups.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the Parent View online questionnaire were positive about the school and would recommend it to other

parents. A minority of parents raised concerns about bullying. Inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns. As one parent commented: 'My child feels very happy, safe and valued, which makes me happy as a parent.'

- Leaders have developed a sophisticated tracking system that allows leaders and teachers to pinpoint exactly where pupils, including different groups of pupils, are falling behind. This system is supplemented by the 'company structure' of the school, where pastoral leaders in a pupil's company assess their needs holistically so that the right support can be provided. With leaders focusing on pupils' academic needs alongside their personal needs, intervention is more effective.
- Students in the sixth form particularly value their experience. Outcomes in 2016 were in line with national averages and although validated destinations data is not available, the school's own records show that all students who left in 2016 went on to a variety of suitable destinations. Almost all present Year 13 students have university offers and are excited about their future. They told inspectors their teachers are committed to their progress and they have been very well supported in making their applications to university.
- Leaders make sure that all sixth-form students have access to a wide range of non-qualification activities so when sixth formers leave the school they are well prepared and confident to take their next steps. For example, students told inspectors that teachers regularly seek out opportunities for them to do extra activities to build confidence. As one student put it: 'Teachers push opportunities your way, put you on the spot and develop you as a person.' These opportunities include seeking out new hobbies, supporting other pupils in the school with their work and supporting students to set up sports clubs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the rigorous and analytical monitoring of pupils' progress already in place is thoroughly embedded so the improved progress being made by all pupils is consolidated
- retention in the sixth form improves so more students complete their study programmes
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve so their attendance at least matches the national average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sandwell. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met you and your senior team, and the sponsor and chair of the local governing body. We met with leaders for behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, and a company director. We also spoke to groups of pupils across different year groups. We joined leaders in observations of lessons and looked at pupils' work over time. We considered 326 response to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. We evaluated information on pupils' attainment and progress across all year groups in the school, on attendance, on behaviour and the records about keeping pupils safe.

At our initial meeting we agreed on five focus areas for the inspection. These were:

- the quality of teaching and progress of pupils in all year groups
- the effectiveness of the use of pupil premium funding and the progress of disadvantaged pupils
- the levels of absence and exclusions
- retention, information, advice and guidance in the sixth form
- the effectiveness of safeguarding.