

Serco Inspections  
Boundary House  
Wythall Green  
Birmingham  
B47 6LW

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct 0121 683 2042  
ruth.scattergood@serco.com

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Mrs Caroline Badyal  
Principal  
Q3 Academy  
Wilderness Lane  
Great Barr  
Birmingham  
B43 7SD

Dear Mrs Badyal

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Q3 Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Jacqueline Wordsworth HMI and Maureen York HMI to your academy on 9 and 10 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, including procedures for students, and met with the principal, nominated staff, groups of students and the sponsor, who is also the chair of the governing body.

### **Context**

The academy opened in September 2008 in the accommodation of Dartmouth High School, its predecessor school. The name Q3, derived from the Latin word Quererere, encapsulates the academy's mission statement: 'to seek that which is good, right and true'. The academy does not have a faith designation, but its ethos is broadly based on Christian values. It is sponsored by Eric and Grace Payne and has specialisms in design and enterprise. Work on the new academy is nearing completion and the academy plans to move into the building, adjacent to the school, in the first weeks of the summer term.



The academy is average in size with 1033 students currently on roll, including 111 students in the sixth form. Its catchment area is similar to that of its predecessor school, although as the academy's popularity has risen, applications have increased from families living within the immediate locality. Students come from a range of different backgrounds. The majority are of White British heritage, but the proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is almost twice the national figure. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities; the number with a statement to meet their special educational needs is similar to that of other schools. The academy attracts students of all ability but, taken as a whole, the students' attainment on entry is below the national average.

### **Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning**

The academy recognises that attainment is too low. Its first GCSE results in 2009 showed improvement compared with the previous year in the predecessor school, but remained below the national average on most indicators. The academy achieved its target for the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics. Given their starting points, students made broadly satisfactory progress. However, the attainment of boys, particularly those from White British backgrounds, was very low. There were also pockets of significant underachievement, notably amongst students from Indian heritage and girls. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made progress similar to their peers. Results in the sixth form showed significant improvement in 2009 and represent satisfactory achievement. In A-level examinations in 2009 the overall pass rate increased to 100%, with almost half of grades at B or above.

The academy sets suitably ambitious targets and makes very good use of rigorous assessment data to track the progress of individual students. It has worked hard to close the gap in performance between different groups and uses the tracking data to target specific intervention and support. Attainment is rising. Assessment information indicates that the academy will significantly exceed its 2009 results this year; over half of students in Year 11 have already secured at least a C grade in mathematics.

Evidence from lesson observations also indicates that progress is accelerating and that the quality of learning is often good. Students make most rapid progress when lessons are lively and engaging and when teachers use assessment information to define ambitious outcomes for each lesson. Students know their individual targets for each subject and are kept well informed about their level of performance.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Levels of persistent absence are higher than average but attendance has improved and is in line with the national figure. Students' behaviour has also improved significantly and is becoming a strength. As well as being welcoming and friendly, the students' good behaviour and positive attitudes are beginning to make a strong



contribution to good learning in lessons. Around the academy behaviour is orderly and considerate, and in lessons most students comply with instructions and work steadily. Relationships between adults and students are a significant strength of the academy. Incidents of disruptive behaviour are very rare, but are linked with weaknesses in the management of lessons. Students are sometimes quite passive in lessons, particularly when questioning is untargeted or weak, but they enjoy active learning and respond positively when given opportunities to work collaboratively and are sensible when evaluating one another's performance. Many students are keen to make a positive contribution to the academy and the wider community, particularly when given genuine responsibility and independence. Students speak enthusiastically about the opportunities that the academy has provided for them, and many take full advantage of the range of extra-curricular provision on offer. Sixth-form students are excellent ambassadors for the academy.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The quality of teaching varies widely. There are notable strengths and some outstandingly good practice. Teaching is generally well planned, with suitable learning objectives; it is well directed and is soundly based on good relationships between adults and students. Support from teaching assistants is well-informed and properly organised and is sometimes excellent. The best lessons sustain a rapid pace and sharp focus that engages all the students. This is most evident when: planning is precise and ambitious; activities are imaginative, varied and skilfully managed; and assessment is integral to the students' learning, often involving the students themselves in peer- or self-assessment. A significant number of lessons observed were only satisfactory because teaching limited what individual students with different abilities might achieve. The most common limitations were in planning, when the intended learning outcomes lacked challenge, or when teachers had not considered how different students would learn, or the students were not expected to work hard.

Although students know their working levels and the grades or targets that they are aiming for, their next steps are not effectively guided by marking. Too much correction is perfunctory and unrelated to any subject specific objectives. Even when marking gives detailed guidance, teachers do not routinely check that students understand or respond to the advice provided, and its impact is therefore limited.

The academy has taken steps to strengthen provision and improve outcomes by adapting the curriculum to meet the particular needs of the students. The curriculum is broadly divided into three different pathways that enable students to be fast tracked or to have additional support for core subjects, according to their needs and aspirations. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides a good range of vocational options and the sixth form offer also provides a good balance of courses at different levels of accreditation and across a range of subjects. The academy seeks to deliver its specialisms through a combination of dedicated lessons, taught to all students on a Wednesday afternoon, guided options, and by weaving them throughout the



curriculum. However, the impact of the specialisms, in terms of both students' academic qualifications and their personal development is not yet significant.

Staff know the students well and the academy provides very effective care, guidance and support for them, including those who have special educational needs, and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or at risk of failure or exclusion. Transition arrangements are good and the academy works hard to ensure that students feel safe. Procedures for pastoral care are very clear and well organised. One valuable feature is the diary and reflection room which provides students with a haven to share their thoughts and concerns in a trusting and supportive environment. Students are also encouraged to take on real responsibility within the academy and play an important role in decision making.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The appointment of the headteacher from the predecessor school as principal and chief executive has ensured that the transition to academy status has been seamless in terms of day-to-day management and in retaining a sharp focus on raising standards. The strategies for driving improvement that were implemented in the predecessor school have been embedded in the new academy. This is obvious in the academy's settled ethos and the positive climate for learning that is so evident in lessons. However, aligning the vision of the sponsor with the academy's developing curriculum, particularly with regard to incorporating key elements of the its specialisms, has been a challenge because of weaknesses in provision. Notwithstanding some divergence in views on aspects of the academy's development, there is a clear strategic vision, shared by senior leaders and governors, based on improving outcomes for students and achieving excellence.

Procedures for monitoring the academy's work and the progress of students are systematic, and are soundly based on comprehensive analysis of data. Senior leaders use their daily learning walks effectively to check on the work of the academy and the implementation of initiatives. However, the effectiveness of planned actions is not consistently evaluated against measurable outcomes or robust success criteria, so it is not always clear how successfully provision is affecting outcomes for students, particularly aspects of their personal development.

The academy understands the importance of teaching in improving all outcomes for students and the leadership of teaching and learning is consequently a significant strength. Improvements have been achieved by a judicious mix of strategic leadership, systematic evaluation of lessons and through support and professional development which has been developed impressively through the teaching and learning group. Although ambition is not consistently well embedded throughout the academy, the expectations of staff and students have been raised. Evaluations of the quality of teaching are rigorous and are used effectively to strengthen classroom

practice because they feed directly into the staff development programme, as well as providing teachers with specific points for improvement.

The governing body is knowledgeable about the academy and is consequently in a strong position to provide suitable challenge. Governors are also generous with their time in providing support for the academy and its students. The academy has demonstrated that it has good capacity to sustain and extend the improvements made in the first 18 months and to further strengthen the outcomes for students.

### **External support**

The academy has not relied heavily on external support to guide its development because it has good capacity to shape its own improvement. However, good links have been developed with a wide range of providers and partners to support key initiatives.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Accelerate the progress that all groups of students make by increasing the proportion of good and outstanding lessons, in particular by:
  - ensuring that lesson plans set ambitious outcomes for each session focusing sharply on the elements of teaching that actively engage all students in their learning
  - making more effective use of marking and assessment to guide the students' next steps for improvement in each subject.
  
- Strengthen the rigour of self-evaluation by:
  - ensuring that the impact of planned actions and new initiatives is routinely evaluated
  - defining quantifiable success criteria against which the academy's effectiveness can be more robustly measured.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Group at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



cc chair of governors  
the Academies Group, DCSF [ [Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk) ]