



THE MERCIAN TRUST

DÉBUT
WELCOME

An introduction to our Trust...

Welcome to The Mercian Trust, now officially an academy trust of 9 schools.

Our Trust has been fashioned through the merger of 2 values-driven, likeminded Trusts (The Mercian Trust and Q3 Academies Trust). By coming together we have established our larger family of schools as one strong Trust best positioned to serve our local communities.

The Mercian Trust is committed to becoming an employer of choice for all our current and future staff. We are confident that our Trust-wide staff development programmes offer, and career progression opportunities, will enhance the experience of our teachers, student-facing support staff and business support staff alike.

We are delighted that you are part of our shared journey at this significant time.



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ECONOMY OF TOGETHER

As Chair of the Mercian Trust I am delighted to welcome all our staff, students and school communities into this next chapter of our development. Becoming a family of 9 schools with more than 9,000 students means we share a greater responsibility to make a difference in our local boroughs of Walsall and Sandwell – and beyond.

A shared ethos, values and commitment to social mobility initially brought a diverse group of schools together to form The Mercian Trust and it is this same common purpose that has brought Mercian and Q3 together, now, as one academy trust.

Economy of Together

As the Black Country LEP Board Lead for Social Mobility and Inclusive Growth I am proud to see the contribution our Trust is making, and will make, towards the collaborative vision we have set throughout Walsall, Sandwell, Dudley and Wolverhampton.

Our family of schools have an important role to play in achieving our collective ambition of:

- * **A more equal and equitable Black Country**
- * **A better educated Black Country**
- * **A more enterprising Black Country, with greater social responsibility**
- * **A healthier Black Country that is environmentally friendly.**

Our schools, leaders, teachers, and support staff each shape the thoughts, beliefs, aspirations and actions of the children and young people in our trust. Indeed, we shape our students' futures far beyond the examination results they achieve in Y11 and Y13.

I am proud to chair our board of trustees at this time. I look forward to working with you and spending time in each of our schools in the months and years ahead.

WELCOME TO DÉBUT

Our 9 schools have been working together for 2 years now as part of our trust partnership and it has been my privilege to lead both Mercian and Q3 as CEO since January 2022. But it is today that we take a moment to recognise our trust merger now that all the legal and logistical processes have been completed.

This premium magazine is primarily for staff in each of our schools and central teams. It marks the week we legally became one trust, one employer, one family of schools – and it sets out important messages at this exciting time of change and development for us all.

Increasing opportunities and improving outcomes

Our common purpose is to increase opportunities and improve outcomes for our students. We have been committed to driving social mobility in the West Midlands (long before 'levelling up' became a government policy) and we are excited about the greater impact we can have following our merger. As one employer, one trust, we take very seriously our commitment to increasing opportunities for our staff too (which you can read about in this magazine). For many of us our joint leadership meetings, school improvement activities, strategic groups and subject network groups have each seen us working very closely together for some time, so in many ways this will not change. However, as we complete this academic year and prepare for 2022/23 you will start to see changes in how our trust executive team and governance structures apply to your school or central team.



So, what should we expect next?

Just because the 3x Q3 Academies have now legally transferred into the Mercian Trust it doesn't mean our 'merger work' is complete – far from it! Leaders have been working to ensure the success of our trust merger since 2019 and focused leaders in our central team have been working on our merger transition plan formally for around a year now – and this plan continues until 2024! We will engage with staff in the summer and autumn terms in both formal and informal consultations regarding policies, procedures and practices as we work to establish the best next steps forward learning all we can from each other in our new larger family.

And what about after that?

The government's Education White Paper 2022 sets out a number of clear ambitions for our sector and our trust will be at the forefront of shaping and delivering education policy for the benefit of the students in our schools and the communities we serve. In the

years ahead you should expect to see us engaged in a wide range of developments including:

[1] A period of **consolidation** to ensure our trust merger is successful.

[2] Work to ensure **inspection outcomes** demonstrate our impact (in terms of improvement and innovation) in each of our schools.

[3] The **Digital Transformation** of our teaching, learning and leadership practice including:

[A] The successful roll out of our consolidated IT platform and ecosystem in all 9 schools.

[B] Significant capital investment into IT infrastructure and staff training to enable 21st century working.

[C] Progress in all schools against the Education Transformation Framework (and other research-based recommendations on using digital technology to improve learning).

[4] **Developing free school application(s)** including a specialist 16-18 school.

[5] Securing **sponsor status** in order to sponsor **one or more underperforming schools** within The Black Country.

[6] Further developing innovative **delivery partnerships** with universities and other training provider partners.

[7] Further developing collaborative working and more formal partnerships with other MATs and families of schools in the Black Country.

Together, our mantra is...

Life to the full in pursuit of what is...

In the turbulence of the last 2 years it is easy to reflect upon the things that have made our lives less full, less rich, less whole, and where the experiences of our students have been diminished or diluted as a result of the pandemic and subsequent absence from school. But that doesn't mean we have lessened our expectations, our ambition or our mission!

The first part of our mantra is

Life to the full.

We define life to the full as equipping students to:

[1] Fulfil their potential

[2] Thrive in the world of work (when they leave our schools and sixth forms)

[3] Make a positive contribution to their families and the local, national and international community.

It is with these three 'pillars' that we articulate our vision as a trust and we hold ourselves accountable for ensuring we achieve it in all our schools over a sustained period of time.

good, right and true.

Defining what we mean by 'good, right and true' sets out **HOW** we go about our work, individually, as teams, as schools, and as one academy trust. It sets out the behaviours and approaches we must all 'model' for each other and, most importantly, for our students so we can teach them to do the same!

So being in pursuit of what is '**good**' means demonstrating honesty, integrity, and positivity in our work with each other whatever role or roles we fulfil.

Being in pursuit of what is '**right**' means ensuring we demonstrate professionalism, teamwork, and a pioneering spirit (our trust values innovation and improvement in equal measure).

Being in pursuit of what is '**true**' means ensuring our work is recognised for its accuracy and precision – and that our approach to work is recognised for its sincerity.

Honesty Integrity
GOOD Positivity Pioneering
Professionalism **RIGHT** Spirit
TRUE Teamwork
Accuracy Precision Sincerity

WE ARE FAMILY.

Siblings, **not** clones, that is how we describe our diverse family of schools. It is our richness of diversity that many of us find so precious about our trust.

We are not a one-size-fits-all trust and we never will be. We value the unique character of each of our schools and the unique history that is so often deep rooted in the communities we serve. It is school leaders who are best placed to set the vision for their curriculum. You will not see our trust instructing school leaders to harmonise exam boards or teach the same scheme of learning, after all we are not clones of each other! It is each school that must ensure their curriculum best enables their students to achieve their potential, thrive in the world of work (when they eventually leave us), and develop the character to make a positive contribution to their family as well as the local, national and international community.

But furthermore, we are one trust, one family, and our dedication to each other means recognising and celebrating our differences, while at the same time demonstrating our commitment to each other by helping, supporting and prioritising the wellbeing and success of each other.

Lyrics from the 1979 Sister Sledge 'disco classic' include: *High hopes we have for the future, and our goal's in sight.* It may be a tenuous link, but as one larger family of schools we are able to support each other much more effectively and together achieve our hopes, dreams and goals for the future as a result.

The **PROBLEM** AND WHY IT FAILS with Collaboration...

Collaboration is one of those words that so many of us like to use but we rarely have an agreed definition of what it means.

Purposeful, impactful, and sustained collaboration can make almost anything possible, in any of our schools and central teams. Let's not kid ourselves, no one school, no one Trust, no one executive leader can possibly have all the answers required for the challenges our schools and communities face today. From COVID recovery to social cohesion, from cyber-security to environmental sustainability, from staff wellbeing and workload

to addressing the social emotional mental health challenges our students face – collaboration is required and essential if we are to make a difference.

Yet, effective collaboration is something we see regularly diluted or nullified because we don't really work to make it work. All too often we leave it to chance, or simply hope for the best. A year or so ago Dan Parkes, our CEO, led a session with heads and executive leaders looking at this as part of our Trust partnership and considered 4 main reasons why, despite enthusiasm and goodwill, most collaborative opportunities fail. Being clear on why collaboration fails helps us ensure it doesn't.

We were not prepared to prioritise the collaborative opportunities for us (even though we said we valued them. Sometimes we say collaboration, but really, we probably mean cooperation. We are happy to cooperate on our own terms – but when collaboration requires us to prioritise our time, energy, effort and resource (to prioritise something means to give precedence to) then we quickly back off, shy away, and watch our collaborative work become under-resourced and ineffective.

We failed to put sufficient protocols in place to secure the collaborative activity over time. Collaborative ventures can start well enough, but can quickly lose momentum. Without early and clear protocols in place, we fail to ensure the longevity of our collaborative efforts. It is nearly always quicker and easier to take a decision, or make a plan, on our own, rather than collaboratively with others. As teachers, we spend time at the start of every school year re-setting the ground rules for our classes and our classrooms. The same is required with the protocols for each of our collaborative projects, initiatives and ways of working.

We didn't commit enough energy or sustained focus to realising benefits over time. Commitment means 'a promise' or 'an obligation'. Demonstrating our commitment to each other and to our collaborative endeavours often means a demonstrable investment of time, focus and energy. All commitments come at a cost sometimes money, always time, focus and energy. The outcomes, successes and benefits of our collaborative work takes time and we need to make the required investment.

We ignored the fact that collaboration and competition co-exist. We start most collaborative ventures by saying we will 'play nicely' and often we do. But we rarely accept something that is part of human nature that collaboration and competition often co-exist among people working towards a shared common goal or purpose. It is an interesting dynamic and can, get a little messy, Let's just call it out for what it is and deal with it! Just as in most families, we work together, want the best for each other and instinctively compete with each other a little too.



ALDRIDGE SCHOOL

Walk through the doors of Aldridge School and chances are you'll hear an ensemble, choir or orchestra rehearsing for their next concert.

The school's almost 1600 students come from both Aldridge and Walsall and reflect the populations of both places.

But the school also gives 10% of its places to students with an aptitude for music. These students don't need to have had any formal music lessons or to have taken music exams, they just have to show an ability in the subject during an audition.

The result is a school that is a wonderfully diverse mix of students and boasts not just one jazz band, but two, as well as an annual musical production that attracts regular volunteers from the local community.

It's not just about music though at Aldridge. On Friday lunchtimes, every student chooses a club to attend. There's something for everyone, from mindfulness to table tennis and from sci-fi to The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. There's even an opportunity to look after chickens, for those that want to.

"We want to give our students opportunities that they wouldn't normally have," says Ian Bryant, who has been head since 2017. "We encourage our students to try things, to go outside of their comfort zone. It's all part of preparing them to flourish."

Ian is looking forward to our merger when we will become a family of nine schools.

"Collaboration is so important for us all," he says. "Our older students have opportunities to mix with their peers from other schools in shared sixth-form lessons and I'm keen for this to expand with other schools in our Trust so that they realise that the differences between us all are not nearly as big as they might think."

"As staff, we're going to benefit hugely from our merger. We'll provide opportunities for career progression more quickly and that means staff are even more likely to stay within our Trust. I'm excited about hearing from everyone else's experiences and learning from them."

SHIRE OAK ACADEMY

Shire Oak Academy wants its students to take part in as many extra-curricular activities as possible, both inside and outside school. In fact, so much so that it has created a list: **50 Things To Do Before You're 18** ¾.

It includes camping under the stars, working alongside an expert, visiting a large city and learning how to take a picture.

The school makes it a priority to offer these opportunities as they may not be possible for everyone otherwise.

"We believe that participation in extra-curricular activities on a regular basis is really the best way to help enhance our students' social and academic skills and develop their personalities at the same time," Annabel Stoddart, the school's head, says. "At Shire Oak, we're a community school that is about widening opportunities and providing experiences for our students."

The school also has a strong focus on developing the leadership qualities of its 1500 students. Each year group has a student leadership team that specialises on a particular theme. Year 10's team have had training to be wellbeing ambassadors, while Year 11's team are revision experts.

"I walk around the school and I'm so proud to be here," says Annabel. "The students help each other and the staff want the very best for them."

Our merger, when we become a family of nine schools, will bring many new opportunities, Annabel says. "Successful leadership for me has always been about collaboration - an individual school can only have so many answers. There's an impressive range of leaders in our Trust and many things we can all learn from each other. The power of our network is so important and that network is about to get bigger."

OUR SCHOOLS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

"The leavers' assembly is my absolute favourite part of the school year," says Mark Arnall, Head of Q3 Academy Great Barr.

"While I'm sorry to see our students go, it fills me with huge pride to see how they've grown in terms of their characters and their ambitions. Helping young people through the ups and downs of teenage years is a real privilege."

"I see confident, capable young adults ready for the world ahead of them and it makes me quite emotional - although it's even better when they come back to visit and let us know how they are getting on."

A "relentless commitment to care" and "high academic ambition" are at the core of Q3 Academy Great Barr. "After all, it's only when students feel secure and comfortable that they can be challenged to grow and learn," says Mark, who has been Head since 2016.

The school has almost 1,180 students and is always oversubscribed with excellent links to its wider community.

But it's also the community of our Trust that Mark values. He's enthusiastic about our merger, when we become a larger family of schools.

"This is a really good opportunity to bring together two Trusts with very similar missions," he says. "It will open up many more opportunities for our students as they will benefit from the huge range of experiences we have available across our Trust."

"It will also be very positive for our staff as there will be a wider range of training for them. This is an exciting milestone for us all - it will strengthen the community of our Trust and lead to a greater degree of collaboration and support for us all."

Q3 GREAT BARR



Lunch at **Q3 Academy Langley** is what Peter Lee, the school's head, calls "a family occasion".

The school's nearly 1300 students check the seating plan and wander over to the table they've been allocated.

Today it's 'Topical Tuesday' and the discussion is about the war in Ukraine. Tomorrow might be something far less weighty, such as whether pineapple really does belong on pizza. Students debate the topic with their peers on their table, but there's a roving microphone for those who'd like to share their views with the whole school.

"It's about developing students' interpersonal skills," says Peter Lee. "I want our students to be able to have conversations about politics, to come across as confident and to develop their own views. Here, they also learn how to share ideas, compromise and listen to other perspectives."

Peter says it's harder than ever for parents and carers to make time to sit with their children at meal times and so, as a school family, he makes this a priority.

"By doing this, we model a sense of community and show our students that it's important to be engaged with the outside world," he says.

Peter has been the head of Q3 Academy Langley since it opened its doors in 2016. He's made it his business to visit some of the most innovative schools in the country so it's no surprise that he's decided to do some things a bit differently.

The school day is longer than usual with KS3 starting at 7.45am for breakfast and leaving at 3pm or 4pm. KS4 starts at 8.30am and goes on until 3.30pm. The day is divided into three periods and students have longer than usual with their form tutors so that they can really get to know each other.

Peter says our merger, when we become a family of nine schools, will spark further innovation.

"We have a brilliant set of teachers across our Trust and so many different things to learn from each other. I'm excited to hear from others about what has worked well and what hasn't and to share our own experiences."

Keziah Featherstone, head of **Q3 Academy Tipton**, describes her school as a "celebration of just about every kind of student you can imagine".

The school's 1,500 students are a wonderfully diverse mix of races, religions and backgrounds.

Last time Keziah totted up the number of languages spoken at home, it came to almost 60.

Keziah's ambition for each student - no matter their circumstances - is the same: to equip them with the knowledge and skills to reach their potential, to lead fulfilling lives and to become confident and well-rounded adults.

"We let our students know that there's simply no limit to what they can achieve," she says. "And that's reflected in how they view themselves in the world. They want to change the planet; they care about humanitarian causes and they are ambitious."

Keziah joined Q3 Academy Tipton as head some three and a half years ago when the school joined the Q3 Academies Trust.

Now, she's not just the head, but a parent with a pupil at the school. And a very proud one at that.

She says our merger means that, as a family of nine schools, we'll have an "enviable" set of experienced colleagues and a "support system that's second to none".

"Something that distinguishes our new, larger Trust is the respect and the belief we all have in each other. We're here for one another and we're heading towards even greater things," she says. "Being able to work with peers who have fresh ideas and have worked in different types of schools is just invaluable."

Keziah has wasted no time and is already working with the Trust's central services to further improve special needs provision and provide extra staff in certain subjects at Q3 Academy Tipton.

"We're not going to be so big that we lose our identity or our autonomy, but we are going to be large enough to all benefit from additional resources and have that much more clout to get things done," Keziah says.

WITH A 'CATCHMENT' BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE LOCALITY

QUEEN MARY'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Queen Mary's Grammar School in Walsall was founded nearly 500 years ago, making it one of the oldest schools in the country. But there's nothing about it that's stuck in the past.

While rightly proud of its traditions and its place in the history books, the school has a modern and outward-looking approach.

All Year 7s take a taster course in Mandarin, for example, and as many as a third go on to study the subject at GCSE. Meanwhile, the school hosts talks on a huge range of diverse careers to encourage its 1,300 students to "keep their minds open" when it comes to the world of work.

"We recognise and respect our school's history, but we're in no way elitist or stuffy," says Richard Langton, the school's Head.

Creating an inclusive environment where students from all backgrounds thrive is one of the things that Richard cares about most and this starts well before families even apply for a place. QMGS is a government-funded school like any other academy, but with academically selective admissions arrangements. It takes boys from Year 7 and boys and girls in the sixth-form.

The school works very hard to encourage local students with a strong academic aptitude to apply and puts a lot of effort into explaining its entrance tests so that no family is deterred. "We consider ourselves a springboard for our students," says Richard. "We prioritise their mental health and wellbeing and enable them to fulfil the huge potential they have already shown. We want as many young people as possible to benefit from our teaching and the opportunities we offer."

It's what happens outside the classroom that's just as important though at QMGS. The school's Combined Cadet Force is one of the biggest of any state school in the country, while QMGS is in the top 100 schools in the UK for cricket. It also has a field centre in Wales.

"It's just such a privilege to lead a school with so many talented staff and students," Richard says. He believes our merger, when we become a family of nine schools, is just going to expand the number of opportunities further. "We already offer subjects to other schools in our Trust, but I'm looking forward to doing more of this and considering how we can come together to give students volunteering and work experience opportunities," he says. "Our diversity is one of our biggest strengths - there's just so much we can learn from each other."

QUEEN MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL



"We're a school for local girls and that's the thing I am most proud of," says Dr Alison Bruton, head of [Queen Mary's High School](#).

The school selects girls based on their academic ability, but puts a huge amount of time and effort into encouraging local girls from a wide range of backgrounds to apply.

At times, Alison says she needs to bust a few myths about grammar schools.

"Unfortunately not everyone realises that we are a state school - there aren't any fees, we're absolutely free," she says.

With just 891 students, Queen Mary's High School exudes a cohesive, friendly feel and excels when it comes to pastoral care.

The school is divided into four houses - Brontë (red), Eliot (blue), Austin (yellow) and Shelley (purple). Each house has its own assembly and students are so loyal

to their house colour that Alison has to ensure she isn't wearing the wrong colour scarf for assembly. "I have four scarves in each of the different house colours and I have to keep changing my scarf according to whose assembly I'm giving," she says.

Alison is excited about working alongside our other schools as we become a family of nine schools in our Trust. She's already supporting colleagues with quality assurance and is a strong advocate for our Trust Lead Professionals initiative.

"Headship can be quite lonely at times," she says. "But if you have a pool of people with an impressive range of experiences - as we do in our Trust, it can be so much easier. Our merger is good news on so many fronts. For our students, it will expand the subjects they can study and open up new experiences for them. For our staff, there will be many more people to learn from and greater career opportunities that will enable us all to share our knowledge and expertise more widely."

SPECIALIST TECHNICAL EDUCATION

WALSALL STUDIO SCHOOL

Back in the Renaissance, more than 400 years ago, 'apprentices' studied under the guidance of 'masters' and it's this model that has influenced the way Studio Schools operate today. Of course, much has changed and now, thankfully, those 'masters' and 'apprentices' are just as likely to be women and girls as men and boys.

Walsall Studio School has almost 300 such 'apprentices'. It's one of only a handful of Studio Schools in the country and opened its doors in 2013. Its students go on to universities, conservatoires and high-quality apprenticeships. The school focuses on the creative, health and digital industries, which means students have careers as paramedics, therapists, software engineers, actors, dancers, teachers and much else besides.

"Our school is a pipeline to industry," says Darren Perry, the school's head.

"Vocational learning is really important here, but it would be wrong to think that this means our students focus purely on practical work. There's plenty of theory to learn and we strike a good balance between the academic and the vocational. Above all, we challenge our students to be the very best they can be in their chosen fields," he says.

Students join Walsall Studio School in Year 10 and stay until the end of Year 13 or Year 11. Darren says that many students join with aptitude and a passion for a particular career. "They often have a clear sense of direction for their working lives," he says. "We give them depth and experience because they learn from teachers who are also experts in their industries. What we offer is a curriculum beyond qualifications."

For Darren, one of the many advantages of the school is its size. "The beauty of being a small school like ours is the connections that are formed between students and staff," he says. "Everyone here knows each other well and that creates a friendly culture and permeates into all our interactions."

Walsall Studio School was one of the first schools in the country to offer T Levels. It will soon be offering them in health, digital and media. "We're onto our next chapter as a school," Darren explains. "We are broadening our vocational offer and increasing opportunities for our students. Our merger to become a family of nine schools is a real cause for celebration," he says. "As a larger Trust, we'll have that much more of a chance to learn from others, generate ideas together and support each other."

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Chris Bury, Head of **The Ladder School**, is smiling. He's just come from speaking with his Year 11s who have been telling him how much they loved their visit to the theatre to see *Macbeth*.

"For many of our students, this will have been their first school trip," Chris says. "They've got so much out of it. We've taken them out of their comfort zone and they've thrived."

The Ladder School is an Alternative Provision Free School that opened in February 2019. While the school currently has 46 students, it will soon be able to take up to 112 when it moves to new premises in Walsall's St Matthew's Quarter.

The school takes students who are at risk of exclusion or who show challenging behaviour and struggle with attendance,

as well as those who have specific medical or safeguarding needs. Unlike many other Alternative Provision schools, students can study for a range of GCSE and vocational courses to ensure they receive a well-rounded education.

"When you peel back the mask that some students wear, you realise that what sits underneath it is just the same as it is for students in any school in the country," Chris says. "Every student wants to be safe, to learn, to please others and to be fulfilled. Peeling back that mask can take weeks, months or even years, but it's always worth it."

The Ladder School has five 'ethos badges' and they are on almost every wall for all to see - High Standards, Daring to Dream, Traditional Values (such as gratitude and mutual respect), Success and Personalised Support. "We see ourselves a bit like a bridge to a more structured curriculum for our students," Chris says.

"We're here to offer students a second chance."

Chris and his staff have already forged close links with schools in our Trust and this is something he values highly. He wants mainstream schools to know that it's often better to start working with The Ladder School early on as this can lead to better outcomes for a student. But, having worked in mainstream schools himself, he also recognises the challenges of this.

However, our merger - when we become a family of nine schools - will make collaboration even easier, he says.

The thing that makes Chris most proud of our Trust is the fact that "there's no formula for our schools". "We are our own entities, but we learn from and support each other," he says. "I'm looking forward to celebrating the successes of each of our schools and to widening our sphere of influence so that the good work we do can go even further," he says.

THE LADDER SCHOOL

"I want to be a teacher and that's partly because of the teachers I've had here. They do so much more than teach their own subject - they help us prepare for life when we've left the school."

Holly Orme, Year 12, Q3 Academy Tipton

"Whatever my questions, the teachers have time for me. We have a good vibe across our Trust and as we get bigger, that vibe is just going to spread further."

Callum Vincent, Year 13, Shire Oak Academy

"The school has helped me understand what it is that I like, such as art, writing and cooking. While the lessons are hard, they are always interesting. The teachers are welcoming and take their time with me - they really listen to me and respect me. It's shown me how to treat other people."

David Blakemore, Year 12, The Ladder School

"Across our Trust each school is different, but it's clear that we all want to share the great opportunities we have."

Daniel Ndaty, Year 13, Queen Mary's Grammar School

"There's a strong bond among people at this school and everything is very organised so you don't have to worry that something won't happen. If teachers say it will, it will."

Aron Karikari, Year 10, Q3 Academy Langley

"I think one of the most important things I've learnt so far at school is confidence. There's a sense of community in our school and our Trust and that encourages us to stand up and be counted."

Honour Izekor, Year 10, Walsall Studio School

"The school is creating so many opportunities for us to explore what we might want to do when we leave. There's always someone ready to answer my questions and that's good because it could have been daunting otherwise. As a larger Trust, we'll be able to share more between our schools and that means even more resources for everyone."

Jamie Clayton, Year 12, Q3 Academy Great Barr

"I think it's the sense of community we have here that I like the most. You know you can trust the staff and you know you belong here. As a bigger Trust, we'll have even more opportunities to meet students who've had different experiences. It'll widen our horizons."

Sunveer Kaur, Year 10, Q3 Academy Langley

"Although I'm a student at QMHS, I study politics at A-level at Aldridge School. It's been brilliant because I've made so many friends at Aldridge and QMHS and I get to study the subjects I want. As a bigger Trust, more of us will be able to do this."

Holly Coldicott, Year 12, Queen Mary's High School

"I've loved all the different sports I've been able to do at school, but aside from that, it's the way our teachers are with us that I like best. They know and respect us."

Gabryel Willis, Year 13, Aldridge School

Ellie-May Greensill, Year 13, Q3 Academy Tipton

"There's so much I've been able to get involved in at school. I'm one of the Head Students and am on a committee that has just organised a disco for Year 7s. I also help out with the library and am in the LGBTQ+ advocacy group. There will be even more to get involved in as we become a bigger Trust."

"I like being part of our Trust - all our schools have their own identity, but we are still a community that really helps each other. As our Trust grows, we'll be able to use each other's resources and work together even more."

Lyla Kalra, Year 13, Aldridge School

FROM WALSALL STUDIO SCHOOL TO TECH ENTREPRENEUR.

Nine years ago, Keano Chang was one of the first students at Walsall Studio School. Fast forward to today and he's a successful entrepreneur with Google investing in his start-up, as well as one of the school's governors.

What do you remember about Walsall Studio School?

I was 16 when I joined the school and there can't have been more than 100 of us back then. I was inspired by the school's founding vision, which was about nurturing talent and learning by doing. I studied Business and I still use what I learnt back then. My year was a great group of people. We worked hard, but we played hard too.

I remember a business networking event at the school when I was Head Boy. I was on a table with very impressive people from some of the major investment banks. I asked if any of them would like to be my mentor. To my surprise, they all did so I took their cards and have kept in touch with them ever since.

What have you done since leaving?

I joined IBM as one of their youngest employees and stayed there for six years. I worked in Artificial Intelligence, among other areas, and had clients in the oil and gas industries. I absolutely loved it. I recently left to co-found a property tech start-up - iknowa.com - which connects property owners with tradespeople. Google has invested in us and I've been named as one of the top 30 European Black start-up founders.

What advice do you have for students in our Trust?

Learn as much as you can from as wide a range of subjects as possible and get involved with everything and anything you're interested in. I've come to the conclusion that it's good to have an overview of many things. Of course, you'll want to specialise - and it's essential to do that too - but stay curious about everything else too.

You're now a governor at Walsall Studio School, what made you decide to take up the role?

I feel very grateful to have had the experience I did at the school. I learnt a lot about problem-solving and that has been incredibly useful. I felt challenged at the school in a good way. By being a governor, hopefully I can share some of what I've learnt since leaving the school and help other students.



From Q3 Academy Tipton to leadership in the Prison Service.

Jamie Andrews left Q3 Academy Tipton three years ago. She's about to start a graduate trainee scheme for future leaders of the Prison Service.

What do you remember about Q3 Academy Tipton?

Above all, I remember what a good time I had at school and the support that the teachers gave me. They made sure we were thinking carefully about our next steps and had plenty of guidance. I loved sport at school and I helped with the Combined Cadet Force (CCF). When I was 18, I was supporting the CCF leader with the Year 7 to Year 11 cadets. It was huge fun and I developed my leadership skills as a result.

What have you done since leaving school?

I'm about to finish my degree in Sport and Exercise Science at the University of Wolverhampton and after that I'm starting a graduate scheme for leaders in the Prison Service called Unlocked Graduates. As part of this, I'll be funded to do a Master's in Applied Custodial Leadership. It's an area I've been interested in for a while and I'm looking forward to learning about rehabilitation, among other areas.

What advice do you have for students at our Trust?

Keep on top of your work, but also enjoy yourself. Your time at school goes so quickly. I'm still in touch with a few of my teachers and I'd like to stay involved in our Trust. Students benefit from hearing about the world of work from former students who are doing all different types of jobs. I'd like to be helpful to current students who are looking to do similar things to me.

EDUCATION FOCUS

The importance of our work with vulnerable students.

We are a Trust where 'one size fits all' is never the answer. We are proud to recognise and celebrate what makes each of our school communities unique. Our diverse family of schools are connected by our common purpose to 'increase opportunities and improve outcomes', but the education provision in each school is different!

Our new School Development Team work to ensure our staff have access to the best educational thinking and understand how the changing tides of current political policy might affect their work. Over the last few months, we have appointed a team of experts (including Trust Lead Professionals and Directors of School Development) to provide support and guide continual school improvement in all of our schools.

The impact of COVID on our profession and our students has yet to be fully understood. Access to remote learning and prolonged periods away from school have impeded students' learning, as well as their social development. Many students feel anxious about being back at school and worry about whether they will 'catch-up'. Even those impacted the least by COVID disruption have experienced a restricted education over the last few years. Our students are less prepared to learn the curriculum we have planned for them and there has been little learning outside the classroom. We are starting to see the gaps in students' cultural development and therefore the references required to be successful.

We see an increasing number of vulnerable students. Meeting their needs is one of the biggest challenges in education at the moment. In our Trust, staff explore these challenges together.

We can invest in resources and training that would be impossible for a single school on its own.

Of course, COVID has also had a huge impact on staff too. Some teachers are new to the profession and their training experience has been very different to previous cohorts. As a Trust, we are able to develop our staff in a bespoke way to meet our specific requirements. Even our most experienced teachers are noticing their own practice in the classroom is less fluent than before the pandemic.

As education professionals, it is incumbent on us to embrace opportunities to work together, and to refine and reflect on our own practice. Our Trust offers us a vehicle to do this including through our subject learning communities where subject specialists learn from each other and ensure our curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are the very best they can be.

Our commitment to social mobility and social justice is embedded in our Trust's DNA. We know the needs of our most vulnerable students are increasing at the same time as support from local authorities is diminishing. Our SENCOs report that specialist support from the local authority, is often 'too little, too late' and private, specialist support is hard to find and is often too expensive for families or individual schools to commission. This has all been exacerbated by COVID.

National research suggests that students with SEND found remote learning difficult and had limited access to the specialised support they needed. SEND research (published May 2021) confirms earlier findings, that the most effective practice happens when schools, external agencies and families work together to meet the needs of our students with SEND.

In an effort to address these challenges we have begun to invest and develop our own Trust-wide service, in effect, making external agencies part of our Trust. The Mercian Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) consists of qualified professionals including Music, Speech/Language and Occupational Therapists and psychologists. This team works directly with our students and their families and offers advice to our school-based SEND teams.

In just its first term (Autumn 2021), our MDT triaged over 70 school referrals and undertook nearly 50 assessments. This is a substantial achievement, especially considering the average local waiting time for external agency assessment is now over 12 months. The average waiting time for referrals to the Mercian MDT is less than 10 days.

We want to do even more. Our MDT is now being supported by trainee therapists and nurses from undergraduate programmes. The impact of our multi-disciplinary team is evidenced with improvements in student attendance, behaviour, confidence, resilience as well as students themselves reporting feeling happier in school. We have seen in-school staff benefit from more precise support measures and parent communication has been enhanced with improved reporting on pupil progress.

We have begun to unpick why some students experience school as a place of high anxiety. We have learned that often small adaptations to the school day can make a significant difference to the wellbeing, progress and lived experience of some of our students.

Over the next year we will be developing opportunities for our staff to train as specialist assistants to work alongside our innovative MDT.



“I’ve loved all the different sports I’ve been able to do at school, but aside from that, it’s the way our teachers are with us that I like best. They know and respect us.”

Gabryel Willis, Year 13, Aldridge School

Pastoral Liaison Officer and ‘everyone’s nan’ - Glenys Talbot



Glenys believes that growing up is harder now than it was when she was a teenager. “There are many more challenges and pressures,” she says. “If I had a fall-out with a friend at school, I’d go home and I wouldn’t hear from them until the next day. That’s just not the same nowadays.”

As well as pastoral care, Glenys is often the first person to take visitors to their meetings and ensure they are well looked after. It’s a job she greatly enjoys. “Queen Mary’s High School is a very welcoming school. I’m lucky - I like what I do and I like the freedom I have to do different things as part of my role,” she says.

Glenys is optimistic about the future too. “We’re a growing Trust and that means that the opportunities for all of our students are just going to increase. They’re going to have a wider outlook on life while they’re with us and that’s such a positive thing,” she says.

“I’m like every student’s nan,” says Glenys Talbot. “They come and talk to me and I’ll listen to whatever it is that’s on their mind.”

Glenys, 61, has worked at Queen Mary’s High School for 11 years. She started helping in the kitchen and then opened up “Glen’s Den” - a place where sixth-formers could buy a hot chocolate or cup of coffee.

Now, as Pastoral Liaison Officer, she’s often students’ first port of call if they are worried about something or need a shoulder to cry on.

“I’ve got a bit of a unique position at the school,” Glenys says. “Everyone knows me - I’m a friendly face and that bit older than everyone else. I think - and hope - that students see me as someone who won’t judge them. I’ll have a natter with them and make them a cup of tea and hopefully calm things down a bit or direct them to some other form of help.”

“I’ll have a natter with them and make them a cup of tea”

Our Trust community includes many **parents** and **governors** who kindly give their time to support our schools. A few of them share their hopes for the future of our Trust

Dawn Walker is a primary school teacher who has been a governor of Aldridge School for the last eight years. Both her sons went to the school.

“It was hard not to become involved in Aldridge School. My boys went swimming there back when they were at primary school. The school - and our Trust - are a big part of our community and I've always wanted to support them.”

“Being a governor is a lot of fun, but it's also a serious role which is about giving an outsider's view and scrutinising the school. I'm so proud of what we have achieved so far as a school and as a Trust. As a governor, you have a very privileged position because you see staff developing in their careers. But the best thing of all is seeing how much our students achieve. That's why our annual awards evening is my favourite time of the year.”

“As a bigger trust, we are going to be able to offer our students many more opportunities. We already share expertise in many areas, but we will be able to do this on a larger scale. We'll have an even bigger impact.”

Surinder Singh has been a governor at Q3 Academy Tipton for four years. He's a funding manager for The National Lottery Community Fund and lives in Dudley.

“I'm the lead governor for careers at our school and what I like most is bringing people into the school to talk about different jobs so that our students know about a wide range of workplaces. Careers advice is so important - it's something I never had when I was younger.”

“I've seen so many positive changes at Q3 Academy Tipton over the last few years and I'm full of optimism for our future as we become a larger Trust. We are scaling up what we do and with that comes greater opportunities and responsibilities.”

Mary Jones is a civil servant who has been a governor of Queen Mary's High School for more than 15 years. She's also a former student at the school and is Chair of QMHS's Old Girls' Club.

“You don't always appreciate school when you're there. It was only when I started to reflect back on my time at QMHS that I realised just how fortunate I had been.”

“I entered the school as a bit of a shy and easily intimidated girl, but I had acquired a quiet confidence by the time I left that has stayed with me ever since. That's partly why I wanted to be a governor - to put back some of what I got out of the school.”

“I know many of us feel the same. Some of our 'Old Girls' are in their 80s now and when they come together at events, they talk about their teachers and their times there as if it was yesterday. I think that as a bigger Trust, we will benefit hugely from centralised systems and learn from staff and students with a wide range of experiences. It can only be a very good thing.”

Chris Pritchard's two daughters have attended Q3 Academy Great Barr. He is an accountant and has been a governor at the school for six years.

“I live near the school and I've noticed that I often see our students with big smiles on their faces as they walk in. That doesn't surprise me. The school gives so much to the students, whether that's the very best teaching, high quality technology to use at home or school trips that they'll never forget.”

“As governors, we are the school's critical friends, offering support and challenge. I'm proud to be part of our school and our Trust community. Given how much we've accomplished over the last few years, I'm extremely excited to see what we can achieve as a bigger Trust.”

BIG → MOVES

Our CEO, Dan Parkes, describes BIG MOVES as changes that are not easily undone by a future executive leader or board of trustees. "A BIG MOVE is not a big change at all if it can be changed back again with ease" he says. Dan also defines a BIG MOVE as something that requires a significant investment of time and money.

Educational leaders and public officials are becoming increasingly interested in The Mercian Trust because of its diverse nature and its investment in becoming a strong Trust that leads its schools, the communities they serve and the wider education sector.

Dan says; We have an ambitious vision for our Trust and our mission to increase opportunities for all our students won't 'just happen' we have to invest the resources we have wisely.

Over the last year Trust BIG MOVES have included our Trust merger as well as significant investments in creating the partnerships and technical infrastructure to enable the digital transformation of how we teach, learn, lead and operate in every school and central team.

Each BIG MOVE needs to push forward our strategic plan which in turn needs to deliver our vision and mission as a family of schools, one academy trust. As we consider our BIG MOVES for next year we recognise that we are building on some excellent work in recent years. The DFE's White Paper and SEND Review (both published in March 2022) set out the government's vision for our sector. Our Trust is positioned well to play its part for the benefit of children, families and communities in Walsall and Sandwell. Next year our BIG MOVES will embrace the opportunities we have to lead

improvement and innovation at scale now that we are a trust of 9 schools. Our BIG MOVES will also bring investment into the business structures, systems and spaces to maximise the benefits of our Trust merger. Our BIG MOVES next year will continue our ongoing investment into Digital Transformation – delivering real tangible benefits for us all. We will also be providing the strategic investments required to develop new free school applications – including the anticipated 16-18 free schools for Walsall and Sandwell (now that both have been identified by the government as Education Investment Areas).

Not every move is a BIG MOVE, but we are pleased to have built the leadership and financial resources we need to execute the BIG MOVES that benefit our schools, our staff and most importantly our students.



Why our logo is a large pink tree

Trees are, of course, a symbol of life - after all, they produce the oxygen we need to stay alive.

But a tree isn't just functional; it's something that symbolises potential and enhances our natural environment in so many different ways.

If you've ever been lucky enough to see an almond tree, you'll know that it is among the first to blossom each year and, as a result, to mark the change in seasons. Sometimes, its dazzling flowers can be seen as early as February.

The giant sequoia tree, meanwhile, is one of the oldest and largest trees in the world. Its strength doesn't come from its size though; it comes from the fact that its roots interlock with other sequoias giving stability, resilience, and longevity. Those roots are underground, hidden from most people's view.

The giant sequoia trees use fire - something we naturally associate with adversity and risk - to its advantage as one of the main ways it reproduces. The fire produces hot air, which moves up through the tree's limbs and dries its cones. The cones drop and release their seeds to the ground. The seeds are then dispersed by the wind.

It's the almond tree and the giant sequoia that inspired our Trust's logo.

They naturally reflect what we, The Mercian Trust, are all about. We exist to equip our students to live life to the full. That means living a life that fulfills their potential, that sees them thrive in the world of work, conquering adversity and making a positive contribution to their local, national and international communities.

[WHAT NEXT]

Whatever role you have in our Trust, you are valued. Your work is really important as we work together to support our schools and students to thrive.

We are delighted that you are with us as we reach a pivotal moment for our organisation. Together we can shape a strong future as a growing family of schools.

From September, we will be organising a series of events to mark this important moment - please see the QR code below for more information.

Thank you again for the part you have all played in helping us get here. We all look forward to sharing our continued success over the coming months and years.

Best regards

Dan Parkes and all the trustees, governors and leaders in our Trust.



Benjamin Adams
Iftikhar Ahmed
Alexandra Birch
Samantha Blakemore
Rev Beverley Boden
Jane Bonner
Julie Bridgett
Sean Brookes
Carl Brown
Ruth Bryant
Peter Burke
Dennis Byfield
Keano Chang
Kasim Choudhry
Paul Cliff
Robert Colbourne
Alison Connop
Charlotte Cordon
Melanie Crooks
Melanie Davies
Kevin Davis
Nicholas Dean
Gerry Denston
Stephen Downes
Simon Dutton
Paola Easton

Debbie Evans
Vivian Fairbank
Andrew Feilden
Heather Ford
Olalekan Gabriel
Keith Green
Ranesh Gupta
Richard Hadley
Mark Harland
Rebecca Hawkings
Rebecca Harsey
The Rt Hon Sir Gary
Hickinbottom
Will Hodson
Kevin Hubery
Daniel Hunt
Michael Idowu
Dr Zain Iqbal
Kirsty Irving
Samantha Johnson
David Jones
Mary Jones
Zara Khan
Richard Kirk
Stephen Knight

Jackie L'Herroux
Alex Lamb
Timothy Lawrence
Jonathan Lea
Paul Lee
David Lomax
Louise Markham-Moore
Richard Mason
David Mee
Thomas Miller
Mark Mitchell
Jane Mole
Jessica Moody
Neil Moseley
John Murray
Rahila Naguthney
Timothy Normanton
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Hamel Patel
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David Pope
Brian Powell
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Mark Purcell
Joanna Quaye
Robert Quayle
Sheridon Quinton
Karen Reid
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Roland Roberts
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Sarah Russell-Giles
Rev Martin Rutter
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Dawn Walker
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Jo York

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to our **Trustees + Governors**



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