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16 May 2013

Mr Lee Mallin
The Principal
Harris Academy Morden
Lilleshall Road
Morden
SM4 6DU

Dear Mr Mallin

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Harris Academy Morden

Following my visit with Lesley Cox, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 14 and 15 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, the Chief Executive Officer of the Harris Federation, the Chair of the Governing Body, and groups of students.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all students.

Context

The academy opened on the same site as the predecessor school, Bishopsford Arts College, on 1 March 2013. From September 2012, the academy was licensed to operate within the Harris Federation, although formal conversion did not take place fully until the completion of all financial and building transactions, in March 2013. The majority of staff transferred from the predecessor school to the new academy, although 19 teachers have since left. Permanent appointments could not be made until the academy conversion was formally complete, and, until April 2013, a high

proportion of teaching was delivered by temporary staff. The academy is now fully staffed, with the exception of a special educational needs coordinator. Several subject leaders are new, including in science and mathematics, and a new Vice Principal, currently working part time, will join the academy full time in September. The senior leadership team is otherwise the same as in the predecessor school, with the exception of the Principal, who was appointed permanently in May 2013. The academy shares an Executive Principal and a governing body with Harris Academy, Merton.

The academy is a smaller than average-sized secondary school, and is mixed, with 591 students on roll. It has a higher-than-average proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals. About 40% of students are White British; the majority belong to a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, with the largest groups being of African, Caribbean, or Asian heritage. A high proportion of students, over 40%, speaks English as an additional language. A higher-than-average proportion of students is disabled or has special educational needs, almost one fifth are supported through school action; about the same proportion receives help from beyond the school or has statements of special educational needs. About 30 students in Years 10 and 11 attend work-related courses off site, such as in colleges.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The drive for improvement in this new academy is relentless. Expectations are high. As a result, students are making better and faster progress than ever before. This was summed up in the words of one student who, asked what had changed since the school became an academy, said, 'Now I can excel.'

All teachers in all subjects closely monitor learning and progress. Every student has a set of demanding targets and constant support to meet them. A long history of underachievement in the predecessor school means that there is a lot of ground to make up. In response to this, teachers provide intensive catch-up lessons, after school and at weekends, to help anyone who is at risk of falling behind. The Principal is confident that, as a result of this and improvements in teaching, GCSE results for 2013 will improve significantly. The academy's careful records of individual progress support this view strongly.

All students now make better progress in English and mathematics than in the past, because of stronger teaching and leadership. English lessons, once a weakness, are now consistently good. Boys no longer lag behind girls. Other gaps in achievement, such as between students eligible for free school meals and their peers, are narrowing quickly. The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs has been very variable in the past. This is also an improving picture, moving quickly towards all groups doing equally well.

Too many students who speak English as an additional language have not made good enough gains in their use of English language over time. Academy leaders consider this a significant risk to their overall achievement. New approaches to teaching these students are in place to make sure that they rapidly improve their

spoken and written English, alongside their subject knowledge. For example, a small group of GCSE science students explored the correct use of terminology to explain the solar system. Skilled teaching ensured that their ability to explain the science in good English increased rapidly along with their subject knowledge.

Senior leaders carefully monitor the achievement of students educated off site, such as those taking work-related courses at college. The Principal does not anticipate the need for ongoing use of this type of provision for large numbers of students, because their needs will be better met internally. In the meantime, the academy keeps closely in touch with external providers to make sure that these students are succeeding, and that there is an appropriate focus on their basic English and mathematics skills.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving rapidly and most is now good. This has been achieved despite the need to rely, until recently, on large numbers of supply teachers. Students talk about teachers 'knowing their subjects better' and teaching being 'better organised'. This is due to successful recruitment and the common planning format on which the Principal insists, which guarantees that every lesson will be properly structured with a clear purpose and aim. Teachers know exactly what is expected of them. Senior and subject leaders monitor the quality of lessons closely. Inadequate teaching is not tolerated. There is constant challenge to teachers to improve and many have. Those unable or unwilling to cope with the pressure of higher expectations have left.

Teaching is tightly focused on filling gaps in students' knowledge and on preparation for examinations. For example, a mathematics lesson was meticulously planned to meet the needs of students who had not grasped Pythagoras' Theorem. By the end, everyone had got it. Learning flourished because of a climate of mutual trust and respect between students and teacher. Students overcame their fear of failure. Such strongly teacher-directed learning has been essential to accelerate the pace of learning. Building on the success of this, students are now ready to be challenged more to think and learn on their own. Occasionally, an opportunity for exceptional progress is missed because knowledge is imparted by the teacher rather than pursued and discovered by the students themselves, or because a potentially enlightening moment is passed over too quickly.

A five-weekly cycle of checking and feedback means that teachers have a sharper understanding of students' individual learning needs. Progress towards targets is continually communicated to students, along with advice on how to take the next step. All teachers mark regularly, using the technique of directing students to 'what went well' and pointing out how their work could have been 'even better'. In the best examples of this academy-wide approach, students act immediately on their teachers' advice, to try out a new problem, or review a piece of work and correct mistakes. This is having a significant influence on students' progress in some subjects, such as mathematics. However, it is less influential elsewhere because not all teachers provide time for students to respond to their marking. Spelling and

grammatical errors are explicitly marked and students expected to review and practise corrections; although, this too is not enforced equally well by all teachers.

The drive for higher standards of literacy and numeracy is embedded into teachers' lesson planning and helps students to understand the importance of good literacy in every subject. Teachers share what works well and develop their own knowledge of spelling and grammar conventions through regular training. Students who struggle with reading receive additional help through structured programmes, which, if necessary, take them back to basic strategies of matching letters to sounds.

Gaps in students' knowledge of English are tackled directly, through small group grammar teaching, as well as within whole classes, where there is some very good use of visual resources to support understanding. This is accelerating learning, although the impact is limited where teachers lack detailed knowledge of what students already know and can do in languages other than English.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are proud of their academy, of themselves, and of their behaviour, which has transformed. Their discussions with inspectors showed that they were eager and ready for change; they accepted the Principal's high expectations of their conduct from the outset. They say that teachers have become stricter, but that the real change has come from them. They want to do well and understand that good conduct, smart appearance and positive attitudes to learning all contribute to higher standards. They feel safe in the academy. They do not consider bullying to be a problem and have confidence in their teachers to deal quickly and effectively with any concerns.

Behaviour in lessons is now good. Students concentrate and work hard. They listen to teachers and take greater pride in the presentation and completion of their work than in the past. They engage readily in discussion and collaboration, although some lack confidence to share or read their work. These rapid improvements in behaviour mean that many students are now ready to take on greater challenge and responsibility, with less reliance on the teachers.

Attendance is improving and is now above the national average. Systems to challenge unexplained absence are now rigorously applied and, as a result, rates of persistent absence are falling quickly.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal has shown exceptionally strong leadership in rapidly establishing a new culture for the academy. His uncompromising approach to improvement and his vision of excellence for all students is now shared by staff. Students have demonstrated their commitment to change by quickly adapting to new expectations of their behaviour and learning. They relish the challenge. Every aspect of the academy's work is now subject to sharp evaluation; plans for improvement are based on continual checking of progress against ambitious targets. A system for

checking on the performance of teachers is rigorously applied by the Principal, with pay progression withheld if teaching is not consistently good and achievement rising.

The new, highly skilled governing body brings with it the experience of already having developed an outstanding academy. This underpins the high demands the governors place on the Principal and staff to deliver the best for all students. Financial acumen on the governing body supports prudent day-to-day management of a tight budget. Governors only sanction spending that will raise standards. This can be seen in governors' minutes, which include a detailed report and challenging questions on how the academy is using government funding to support the achievement of students eligible for free school meals. Systems for safeguarding students and for the safe recruitment of staff are thorough and sound.

Senior leaders have completely overhauled the selection of courses that students study and their content. There are clearer pathways, designed to ensure that the most able are stretched and the least able supported. Course content is becoming more demanding, in line with rising expectations of students' capabilities. More students take GCSEs rather than alternative qualifications. Academy leaders have their sights set firmly on places in prestigious universities for many. Outside the classroom, there has been an explosion in cultural visits, which make the most of London's museums, theatres and historic sites. Students are invited to 'Cake, Intellectual discussion and Tea' meetings with the Principal. Following the most recent of these, one student wrote of how much he looks forward to the opportunity to read 'the classics' because 'they broaden your vocabulary and stretch your mind'.

External support

The academy benefits hugely from joining an established federation of successful schools. In particular, the close proximity of Harris Merton allows for shared leadership and common approaches to the development of teaching. Federation consultants moderate teacher assessment to ensure that it is thorough and accurate. The academy has taken on tried and tested systems and processes, highly effective in other Harris academies, and this has helped speed improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Create more opportunities for outstanding learning, by making sure that all teachers:
 - plan different tasks and activities that are more closely matched to students' individual starting points and learning needs
 - have a detailed understanding of the precise language and literacy development needs of students who speak English as an additional language
 - help students to take greater responsibility for their own learning in lessons, challenge them to think about culturally or morally significant aspects of the subject, and encourage them to take a lead role in lessons.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Service for Merton, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector