



27 February 2006

Ms Hilary Macaulay  
Principal  
West London Academy  
Bengarth Road  
Northolt  
London  
UB5 5LQ

Dear Ms Macaulay

## **ACADEMIES INITIATIVE: MONITORING VISIT TO WEST LONDON ACADEMY**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Paul Brooker HMI, Linda McGill HMI and Rob Hubbleday HMI to your academy on 8 and 9 February 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a return monitoring visit to the secondary section of the academy (the high school) and a first monitoring visit to the primary section (the primary school), in connection with the academies initiative.

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### **Evidence**

Inspectors met with the principal, a governor, the principal of ADT City Technology College (CTC), senior managers including the vice principals and the headteacher of the primary school, middle managers and groups of pupils. Lessons were observed in the primary and high schools as were other aspects of the academy's work.

### **Context**

The staff and pupils of the primary school and the high school moved into new purpose-built accommodation in September 2005. The local authority special school has also been accommodated within the new building. A DfES

initiated intervention programme for the high school has been in place since the start of the 2005-06 school year. The headteacher of the primary school returned from maternity leave during the autumn term. A new substantive principal took over the leadership of the academy in November 2005 having previously led the intervention programme. The academy continues to experience difficulties in recruiting managers and teaching staff.

### **Achievement and standards**

Pupils enter the nursery with skills that are well below those normally expected, especially in language and communication. They make good progress through the Foundation Stage but standards are still below those of most schools. The pupils are further ahead in mathematical development, particularly shape and calculation, than in aspects of language and literacy.

The pupils continue to make generally good progress as they move through the primary school. Using the performance of the predecessor school as a baseline, the standards have risen year on year at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. While the national test results at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2005 were below the national average, most pupils reached the levels the school predicted and their achievement overall was good in mathematics and satisfactory in English.

The academy has correctly judged that achievement and standards in the high school are inadequate. While the pupils' progress overall during Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, there are significant variations in the achievement of different groups of pupils. The achievement of pupils overall at Key Stage 4 declined in 2005 compared to 2004; nevertheless, their progress in English and mathematics improved. The standards gained by sixth-form students in 2005 were lower than in 2004.

### **Personal development and well-being**

The pupils in the primary school behave well and make good progress in becoming considerate members of society. They speak passionately about living healthily and getting on with other children. Most teachers know the pupils well and manage discipline unobtrusively. The few pupils who are at times incapable of controlling their emotions are dealt with appropriately. Teaching assistants play a significant role in befriending vulnerable pupils and helping them benefit from lessons. Exclusions are extremely rare and the pupils are usually as censorious of bad behaviour as their teachers. The

pupils feel safe and comfortable in the primary school and say there is very little bullying. The pupils in Year 6, however, expressed considerable concerns about the negative impression they have of the behaviour of pupils in the high school.

The high school provides good support and cares well for its pupils. Its ethos has strengthened considerably since the last inspection in July 2005 with the result that the pupils' personal development is satisfactory. The pupils are encouraged to develop healthy lifestyles and pay due regard to their safety. They talk positively, for example, about the new catering arrangements. The revised behaviour policy is consistently applied and greater emphasis is given to celebrating the pupils' efforts and achievements. Better communication between staff enables minor issues to be dealt with swiftly and more effective support to be provided for pupils and staff.

The high-school pupils are generally well behaved around the site. They respect their new surroundings and appreciate the communal areas provided for each year group. The pupils' behaviour in lessons is often good and their attitudes to learning are positive. They typically respond well when teachers set high expectations for their involvement in lessons. In some classes, however, teachers have to work hard to challenge the passivity and reticence of a significant minority of pupils. The challenging attitudes of a small number of pupils are generally well managed, but the weaker teaching sometimes leads to unsatisfactory behaviour and disruption.

While the number of permanent exclusions remains very high, reflecting the unequivocal stance as the high school establishes very clear expectations, the number of fixed-term exclusions has decreased dramatically. This improvement reflects a consistent but inclusive approach to managing unacceptable behaviour. Occasional incidents of aggressive behaviour still erupt, but pupils feel that these, along with any incidents of bullying, are taken seriously and are quickly dealt with.

While attendance so far this school year is below average in the primary school, it is showing a steady and sustained improvement in the high school. There are clear procedures for monitoring and following up concerns with specific families.

The pupils' punctuality in arriving at the high school has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. This improvement is largely the result of

more rigorous monitoring, a firmer stance and consistent approach, as well as a range of other positive strategies. Punctuality to lessons is satisfactory.

The academy promotes a good variety of extra-curricular activities and many are very well attended. As well as sporting and cultural opportunities, for example, the primary school offers clubs for homework and booster classes for English and science, the latter run in conjunction with a breakfast club. Achievement in sport is very well promoted and celebrated. The high school pupils, for example, enjoy many of the good sports and other facilities and look forward to using them in lessons or as extra curricular activities.

There are good procedures for seeking the pupils' views, and their opinions are used effectively to guide the academy's development. They are encouraged to assume responsibilities and demonstrate leadership. The representatives on the revamped school council take their roles seriously and provide a useful forum for debating and guiding improvements and whole-academy activities.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection of the high school in July 2005:

- further improving the pupils' attitudes and behaviour and significantly reducing the number of exclusions – good progress.

### **Quality of provision**

While quality of teaching and learning observed in the primary school was satisfactory overall: two lessons were outstanding. The headteacher and senior staff of the primary school have evaluated the quality of teaching accurately and acknowledge, because of several recent changes in staff, that it is not currently as strong as it has been. Effective steps are being taken to deal with this. The best lessons were outstanding because of the teachers' excellent grasp of the topic the pupils were studying and their skill in identifying the precise steps needed to build on the pupils' prior learning and move them on at a good pace. This teaching motivated the pupils to think for themselves and encouraged them to want to learn more. The satisfactory teaching lacked this precision and tended to consolidate what the pupils already knew, rather than moving them on.

The senior managers of the high school believe that while teaching and learning are inadequate overall, some teachers have improved their practice as a result of intervention. The inspectors' observations substantiated this

judgement and found that the quality of teaching and learning in the high school ranges from outstanding to inadequate, the latter delivered by permanent and temporary staff, with much being satisfactory or good. Lesson planning has improved markedly and generally specifies appropriate lesson outcomes that are suitably pitched at different levels to match the pupils' varied prior attainment. The best plans set a good pace, identified strategies that would help the pupils learn, made clear how the pupils' progress would be assessed, and detailed the support to be provided for pupils' who have learning difficulties and disabilities. The strongest teaching set high expectations for the pupils' concentration, work rate and academic achievement and, for example, encouraged collaborative team work and promoted self-confidence and independence. One or more of these same features, however, were missing from the satisfactory and inadequate teaching, as was the effective management of the pupils' responses to questions and their mild misbehaviour. In common with the primary school, the teaching assistants made valuable contributions to the pupils' learning.

Effective monitoring by senior managers has identified where teaching is strong in the high school and where urgent improvement is required. Appropriate robust actions, coupled with support, are being taken to improve the practice of staff who repeatedly provide inadequate teaching. This has helped some staff to raise the quality of their teaching to satisfactory and sometimes better. The academy, however, does not have enough resources to provide sufficient support for other teachers who cannot be relied upon to teach satisfactorily, or for those who have the potential to improve their satisfactory teaching to good.

The primary school curriculum makes suitable links between subjects and uses a wide range of strategies to engage and motivate the pupils. The 'creative curriculum' is complemented by an appropriate emphasis on core subjects. However, the scope for nursery and reception pupils to learn and play outdoors is restricted by the lack of a covered outside area.

Weaknesses in the high-school curriculum have been recognised and suitable short-term steps have been taken to address some of them. The principal has quickly addressed the immediate shortcomings with the high-school timetable. Pupils, for example, now have a morning break which has proved popular with them. There are suitable plans to introduce a more balanced and appropriate curriculum for sixth-form students and pupils in the high school from September 2006. This has the potential to provide more suitable

curriculum pathways, particularly for vocational courses, and more fully meet the pupils' needs. The academy, following consultation, intends to extend the school day and rationalise the timetable.

The academy's specialism in sport is well developed, particularly in the high school, and underpins the burgeoning achievement ethos. The specialism in enterprise is less well developed but there are clear plans to address this.

The promotion of literacy across the curriculum has had some successes but there is some way to go before it becomes embedded in practice. The primary school offers a good range of literacy activities to enhance the pupils' learning in different subjects. The pupils' oral skills and their reading and writing are promoted as they rehearse their ideas through role-play, give extended answers to questions and work with others. The pupils greatly appreciate this wider variety of approaches and the high quality of some of their oral contributions shows this strategy is having a positive impact. The high school has begun to develop the pupils' literacy skills by sensibly working with a few subjects. There have been some notable successes, for example, the greater attention to literacy in art lessons has led to a higher level of motivation and improvements in the pupils' work. In some other subjects, however, although lesson plans identify the different ways in which the pupils' literacy skills should be taken in to account, insufficient attention is paid to them during lessons.

Links between the primary school and high school to smooth the pupils' transition from Year 6 to Year 7 are developing well. Some Year 6 pupils attend clubs with pupils from Year 7, and they are soon to have lunch in the canteen alongside older pupils. Some teaching is shared by staff from both schools and further work of this nature is planned. Academy staff have also begun to establish productive links with feeder primary schools, particularly those nearby. Events, such as a mathematics day and literacy festival, are helping local parents and children to get to know the academy. There is, however, scope for further development, such as by giving the Year 6 pupils a role in inducting their future classmates from other schools.

The academy is well placed to make good use of assessment information to evaluate and improve its work. Rigorous procedures for tracking the pupils' progress and the performance of subjects have been developed in the high school and the primary school. The staff have a better understanding of how assessment information can be used to improve the provision, drive up

standards and promote the pupils' personal development and well-being. Information about pupils is well co-ordinated and assessment data is used to good effect to provide specific support for targeted pupils. While subjects are beginning to make effective use of performance data, some are at a more advanced stage than others. Similarly in lessons, some but not all teachers make very good use of assessment data to plan work appropriate for different groups of pupils.

The inclusion managers in the primary school and the high school have begun to establish whole-academy systems and approaches for the pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities. The primary school has well established systems and pupils are supported effectively in lessons. The separate procedures in the secondary section have recently been revised resulting in a significant increase in the number of pupils identified who require additional support. A good start has been made in assessing and tracking the attainment and progress of these pupils, and the academy is well placed to judge the effectiveness of the support it provides for them.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection of the high school in July 2005:

- improve the quality teaching and learning – satisfactory progress
- improve the curriculum – good progress.

## **Leadership and management**

The principal's very good leadership, well supported by a hard working staff, including a team of effective senior managers, has led to good, rapid progress across a broad range of the academy's work. The DfES intervention programme has had a strong, positive impact on the academy's work.

Senior managers, including the headteacher of the primary school, have a good and accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. Their evaluations of the academy's performance are frank and honest and usefully build on the recent evaluations drafted by middle managers.

All academy staff are now held to account through a recently introduced, well considered strategy for performance management. Managers at all levels have a much clearer understanding of what is expected of them and are striving to fulfil their responsibilities. Middle managers in the high school, for example, spoke positively about the support they have received and the cycle

of monitoring and evaluation that they have used to promote improvements in their subject areas. The views of pupils and staff have been acted upon. The reallocation of classrooms in the high school to establish subject bases, for example, has been welcomed by the teaching staff despite the hard work and disruption it involved.

The headteacher of the primary school, working effectively with her senior managers, has continued to build on the secure foundations established in the predecessor school. Effective evaluation identifies what works well and what needs to be changed. Information about the pupils' progress is used effectively to highlight underachievement by individuals and issues within subjects. An unexpected drop in science results at Key Stage 2, for example, was analysed and dealt with appropriately. The relatively high turnover of staff is managed well and experienced staff play an important role in supporting those who are less experienced.

Senior managers have correctly identified that inconsistencies in the quality of subject leadership in the high school and limited resources to support essential improvements to the quality of teaching are the most significant factors impeding the academy's further development. Both of these factors are compounded by difficulties in recruiting staff. While remarkable progress has been made in recent months in developing the academy's capacity to improve, it is satisfactory rather than good because of the impediments described above. This remarkable progress has been heavily reliant on external support such as that provided by ADT CTC.

The high school and primary school are operating in the main as separate schools. The principal has recognised the need to develop the academy into a single institution and has taken relevant actions, but far more needs to be done. Important policies, for example, do not cover the whole academy, such as those for behaviour and teaching and learning. There is scope to align procedures and provision across the academy, such as those relating to the use of data about the pupils' achievement and the support provided for pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities. The new, well considered management structure for September 2006 is intended to foster the move towards a single institution. A new approach to improvement planning has the potential to support planning across the academy while also improving its strategic management.



The governing body has refined the way it monitors the work of the academy and it has supported the principal in taking robust actions, such as those relating to the performance of staff. Governors are briefed on developments in both schools by the principal and by the headteacher of the primary school. Important tasks, such as the establishment of consistent administrative procedures, are monitored by committees. There is, however, scope for the governing body to further develop its role as a critical friend. Governors are considering the establishment of further committees. The ideas mooted have the potential to enable governors to form their own view of the academy's progress and to strike an appropriate balance in the attention paid to the primary and secondary phases of the academy.

The academy's new school building provides many good facilities, such as those for sport, about which the pupils talk proudly. They and the staff welcome the much improved learning environment. Having worked in the building, however, senior managers have correctly identified where improvements are needed. There is, for example, no high school library or learning resource centre and there is not enough suitable accommodation for the sixth form.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection of the high school in July 2005:

- making clear to staff what the academy expects of them and what good practice is, and ensure that managers are enabled to fulfil their responsibilities
- introducing systems for holding staff at all levels of management to account for their performance
- introducing effective, robust, challenging and coordinated systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the academy's work on the pupils' achievement.

The academy has made good progress overall in each of these areas since the previous inspection. Progress has been outstanding in recent months.

### **External support**

The academy has gained considerable benefit from the DfES intervention programme. The support of staff from ADT CTC and consultants is strongly evident in the work of staff at West London Academy. This is exemplified by the middle managers who confidently described how they had made improvements in their subject areas and the very recent moderation of

mathematics work by ADT staff that confirmed the judgements of the academy's teachers. External support has been a crucial component in the academy's outstanding progress in recent months.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made good progress since July 2005. Nevertheless, this visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the academy's performance will be monitored.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- improve teaching and learning, giving particular emphasis to the high school
- improve the effectiveness of middle managers, especially in the high school
- drive through the intended changes to the curriculum
- continue to develop the academy as a single institution.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Division at the DfES.

Yours sincerely

Boyd Gunnell  
**HM Inspector of Schools**