



22 February 2006

Mr Phil Hearne
The Principal
London Academy
Green Lane
Edgware
HA8 8BT

Dear Mr Hearne

ACADEMIES INITIATIVE: MONITORING VISIT TO LONDON ACADEMY

Introduction

Following my visit with Robert Ellis HMI to your academy on 1 and 2 February 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

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

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, nominated staff, a group of pupils and sixth form students and the vice-chair of governors.

Context

London Academy is a relatively new school in the London Borough of Barnet. The academy opened in September 2004 in the original buildings of the former Edgware School. A new hi-tech, state-of-the-art building is under construction and the academy expects to move into it in September 2006. The academy is much larger than most other secondary state schools and

caters for 1260 pupils including 298 students in the sixth form. The academy serves some of the most socially deprived wards in the country; over 45% of the pupils in Years 7 to 10 are entitled to free school meals though this increases to 57% in Year 11. Over half of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups, the main groups are of Asian and black African heritage. Over 43% of the pupils are from white British background. Well over one third of the pupils have a language other than English and a similar percentage have a special educational need, a proportion which is high. The academy is a local authority-designated base for 30 pupils with speech and communication difficulties.

There are difficulties in recruitment and retention but suitable strategies have been introduced to retain staff. There was a high turnover of staff in the last two academic years and a significant number of the teachers are inexperienced. However, staffing is now stable and there are good systems in place to support the Teach First and newly qualified teachers. The senior team has been re-organised and all have been in post since the academy opened. An associate principal was appointed in October 2005.

Achievement and standards

The very good achievement of pupils by the end of each key stage places the academy in the top 5% of schools nationally for achievement. Information on the pupils' progress in the first set of national tests and GCSE examinations for the academy show a very positive picture; over time they make exceptionally good progress from a low starting point. Standards of attainment on entry to the academy are now moving towards the average expected for Year 7 pupils, but, previously, most entered with standards in literacy and numeracy that were well below average. Standards achieved by the end of Year 9 and Year 11, although below the national average, surpassed expectations. In the 2005 GCSE examinations, 48% of the pupils achieved 5 GCSE grades A*-C and the proportion of pupils achieving at least one pass was slightly above the national average. The Year 11 pupils did extremely well when their prior attainment is taken into consideration. All pupils achieved well, though the academy is aware that the more able pupils could do much better.

Most post-16 students achieved good results in the 2005 A-level examinations. Over two thirds achieved their target grades; they were

particularly successful in the advanced vocational courses, in mathematics, German, history, drama and theatre studies.

The academy is helping its pupils achieve very well and their rapid progress is a testimony to the positive ethos for learning that has been created, its high expectations of its pupils and the supportive work with them. The academy sets challenging targets for its pupils. Many aspire to high achievement, which is in keeping with the academy's core values. In lessons seen, the use of talk to explore learning and the teachers' high expectations of what pupils can do were contributory factors to good achievement in two thirds of lessons.

Personal development

Personal development is good. Pupils are friendly and welcoming. Around the site, they behave well and good relationships are evident. Most pupils move purposefully between lessons and settle quickly. The few instances of inappropriate behaviour that were seen, for example, some over-boisterousness by a small group of younger boys, was quickly and efficiently managed by vigilant staff so that the academy's high expectations of the pupils' behaviour were met.

In lessons, most pupils have positive attitudes and enjoy their work. Most show respect for each other and adults, although there are a few who do not respect the contribution of other pupils or listen well when others are speaking. Behaviour was at least satisfactory in all the lessons seen and was good in around two thirds.

During the personal and health education (PSE) sessions, the pupils worked well together and had good opportunities to develop the skills needed to work effectively in teams. Some had good opportunities through enterprise sessions to develop financial awareness and consider the factors which influence economic well-being. The academy has good procedures for ensuring the pupils' safety and well-being and the pupils feel that they are well cared for and their views and opinions are sought. The academy is working towards achieving healthy school status.

Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average for maintained secondary schools. There are good procedures for monitoring the pupils' attendance and for challenging those who have poor attendance or

who are late at the start of the day. The number of exclusions has fallen. The academy has clear procedures to identify pupils who are at risk of exclusion and has put appropriate support systems in place to reduce the risk.

Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching was at least satisfactory in most lessons and good in around two thirds, including one lesson where it was outstanding. Most teachers know their pupils well and good relationships help to make lessons go smoothly. In the best lessons the teachers taught at a brisk pace and had high expectation of what the pupils could achieve in the lesson and over time; learning objectives were shared with the pupils so they knew what was expected of them; teachers used effective strategies to maintain their attention; the pupils were given responsibilities and had opportunities to work collaboratively; they were encouraged to evaluate their own progress in relation to the learning objective and were given clear criteria that they could use to judge their achievement; teachers valued the pupils' contributions and gave praise only when it was due; and learning support assistants made very effective contribution to the pupils' learning.

In the few weaker lessons, the teachers' and the pupils' expectations were too low and this sometimes led to boredom and off-task behaviour because tasks were not sufficiently challenging and were finished too quickly. In one case, the pace of the lesson slowed towards the end and the teacher's poor use of time did not enable the lesson objective to be achieved.

Many teachers make consistent use of assessment information to help them plan work that reflects the needs of different ability groups, and to track their progress accurately. However, the academy recognises that consistent use of assessment for learning is a developing aspect of its work.

The rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning by senior leaders and external consultants has enabled the senior leadership team to have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Analysis of outcomes of this monitoring has been used to identify training needs and to target support, and some improvements in performance have been secured.

The quality of learning closely matched the quality of teaching that the pupils experienced. The pupils' progress was at least satisfactory in almost all lessons, good in around two thirds and outstanding in one.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs and aspirations of the pupils. Business and enterprise feature strongly and the pupils are able to apply the skills they have learnt across the curriculum. There are also a series of curriculum days where pupils have good opportunities to further develop and practise these skills. The academy recognises that on entry, a significant proportion of pupils has low levels of literacy. To address this, the academy has successfully introduced a reading programme in collaboration with the local authority (LA) and the educational psychology department. The pupils who have learning difficulties are well supported, mostly in class, but are withdrawn when classroom support is not appropriate. Monitoring and evaluation of the support pupils are given ensures that their needs are met. There is also a learning base that offers small group tuition for pupils who find it challenging to learn in the normal classroom setting.

Specialist status as a Business, Enterprise and Information and Communication Technology academy remains a catalyst to raising achievement. The academy has been sensitive and responsive to the needs of the pupils by successfully fostering their self-esteem and character building through the enterprise curriculum. Inspection evidence confirms that the pupils demonstrate an increasing ability to take control of their learning. The academy reports that Year 10 pupils have successfully used a range of leadership and management skills to win a national accolade.

Leadership and management

The leadership team is very experienced and has been strengthened by the recent appointment of the associate principal. The principal has established a clear mission for the development of the academy. He has succeeded in communicating and embedding the primary aim, which is to develop *'students to be among leaders for tomorrow'*, into the consciousness of most pupils, the senior team and staff. As a result, there is commitment from virtually all staff to driving the school improvement process and raising the aspiration of the pupils.

Since the opening of the academy, the principal's measured leadership has provided stability, continuity for the pupils and increasing recognition of their needs in the local community. However, there is no complacency and his strategic style of management has served the local community very well. As a result, the academy is set to extend its specialism by developing a vocational

centre of excellence within the community. The academy's strategic development plan and self-evaluation clearly demonstrate the significant progress that it has made within the short time since becoming a specialist school. The evaluation is reflective and acknowledges that the senior managers know the strengths and areas for improvement, and have carefully considered plans of action for its development. For example, decisive action has been taken to successfully tackle low literacy skills. The principal's approach is systematic, enabling the academy to run smoothly in restricted accommodation alongside the construction of the new build.

The principal has maintained a sharp focus on eradicating ineffective practices and has increased accountability. First, by laying strong foundations for senior and middle managers and second, by using effective monitoring and review procedures to drive change. There is a strong culture of internal and external reviews which are used to assess progress. The reviews are helpful and provide the middle managers with further guidance on how best to carry out their delegated responsibilities. There are exemplary practices of monitoring and evaluating progress in some faculties where assessment data is used unremittingly to raise both teacher and pupil expectations. However, some middle managers do not have the necessary leadership and management skills to effectively implement the academy's mission and modify action as necessary. With the experience and expertise of the leadership team, the academy is well placed to sustain the improvements.

The governing body gives generously of its time and has an accurate understanding of the academy's work. Records of minutes show that governors are well informed about the provision; monitor the delivery of the action plan rigorously and hold the academy to account for its progress.

External support

The academy works closely with a range of local services and some links, though minor, are maintained with the LA. The quality and impact of the external support from consultants for the academy are good. Reviews and surveys of the academy's effectiveness are explicit. They are based on systematic analysis of the overall effectiveness of faculties and the pupils' satisfaction and needs. These reviews provide a good basis for improving the quality of provision and, thereby, the raising of standards and achievement. The academy works closely with a number of partners, through the LIG and EiC initiatives, to share and explore practices that will lead to improvements

in standards. For instance, detailed analyses of performance data have identified wide-ranging problems that are hindering the progress of white British pupils and swift action is being taken to prevent this.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress, with some outstanding features, towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop in all faculties the consistent use of assessment for learning
- Further improve the capacity of middle managers to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
HM Inspector