



West London Academy

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134369
Inspection number 296193
Inspection dates 26–27 September 2006
Reporting inspector Brenda Cusdin HMI

This inspection of the academy was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy	Academy address	Compton Crescent
School category	Non-maintained		Northolt
Age range of pupils	3–19		UB5 5LP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8841 4511
Number on roll (academy)	1267	Fax number	020 8841 4480
Number on roll (6th form)	120		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Alec Reed
		Principal	Ms Hilary Macaulay
Date of previous academy inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–19	26–27 September 2006	296193

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by six of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the academy

West London Academy is a new school formed by merging two schools in the London Borough of Ealing. In September 2003, secondary students enrolled. In September 2004, primary pupils joined. In September 2005, staff and students moved into the new accommodation. Last year ongoing building work limited some facilities and there were severe staffing difficulties with around a quarter of the secondary teaching posts covered by temporary staff. A successful recruitment campaign has ensured full staffing this year. At the time of this inspection, more teachers than usual were relatively inexperienced and in their first month of teaching.

The students have a diverse range of social and ethnic backgrounds. Overall levels of deprivation are much higher than most other schools. More students join the school part-way through their primary or secondary education and an increasing number arrive with little experience of schooling. A high number of students are learning English as an additional language. There are significantly more students with learning difficulties or disabilities than usual. The skills of children entering the Foundation Stage are well below expectations. Standards on entry to the secondary phase are well below average.

The academy runs a grant-funded nursery, high school reintegration unit, sessions for parents learning English as a second language and a community sports facility. It has specialist status in sports and enterprise. A special school and a local authority adult education centre share the building and work closely with the academy. West London Academy is one of very few schools at the hub of such widespread community learning.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 3

West London Academy has managed considerable change and made huge improvements in a short time. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory and a number of strengths are already evident. The academy has good capacity to improve further.

The principal has outstanding leadership skills. She pinpoints weaknesses and tackles them decisively. She is determinedly pursuing well-reasoned goals for the academy. The academy leadership team has pulled together and worked very effectively to raise standards and improve achievement in the primary and secondary phases. Issues with the sixth form have not been hidden. Although these are not fully resolved, there is a strong commitment to make planned improvements as rapidly as possible.

Taking the academy as a whole, students make good progress and standards are adequate. Children get off to a good start in the nursery. The Foundation Stage develops appropriate areas of learning, paying careful attention to the children's communication and social skills. The academy's Year 6, Year 9 and Year 11 results in 2006 indicated outstanding, adequate and good achievement respectively for the year groups sitting the tests.

Students throughout the age range take their leadership roles seriously. They fulfil their responsibilities competently and proudly. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour is good in the primary phase. Most behave well in the secondary phase but a few lessons were spoilt when staff did not deal quickly enough with the poor attitudes of a few students.

In this early stage of a new school year, the academy correctly judges the overall quality of teaching to be satisfactory. Rightly, given the number of new staff, the academy's monitoring programme is well underway. The academy capitalises on the range of expertise within its walls. For example, very skilled teachers coach newcomers in effective teaching techniques and experienced staff provide specific advice on planning. Outstanding teaching is valued by students: some secondary students spoke passionately about their Year 6 experiences in the academy and how much they learnt from a brilliant teacher.

The academy manages a comprehensive, thoughtful programme of support for vulnerable individuals and groups of students with diverse needs. This helps pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those acquiring English as an additional language, to learn useful skills and make good progress. The sports specialism works very well, developing skills in a wide range of sports and promoting sporting excellence.

The staff are valuable role models for students. The seamless integration of students from the partner special school throughout the academy's life has a powerful impact on students' experiences.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 4

Rightly, the academy recognises that the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form have been inadequate, and that aspects of its sixth form provision remain unsatisfactory. In 2004 and 2005, some students were recruited into the sixth form even though courses did not meet their needs. Many students on the most popular courses, for example those in sports and performing arts, made good progress but others failed to gain accreditation in examinations as a direct result of the unsuitable recruitment policy, combined with some weak teaching.

The academy has acted swiftly and decisively to address these shortcomings. Weak provision has either been withdrawn or strengthened with new staff appointments. The recruitment policy was more rigorous in 2006. The vast majority of current sixth form students are making satisfactory progress. However, the academy was unable to extend the range of courses in the sixth form quickly enough for this school year. The current curriculum offer is limited.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Improve the effectiveness of the sixth form provision so that it appropriately meets the needs of all students.
- Ensure that all staff maintain consistent expectations of students' conduct and use effective strategies to deal with any unsatisfactory behaviour.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Taking the academy as a whole, standards are adequate and have improved substantially in the last two years. Given the low starting points, achievement is typically good. However, rates of progress from one key stage to another have varied.

The pupils get off to a good start in the nursery class and make good progress in developing their social and language skills. They make adequate progress in the reception classes and although some ground is made up, the proportion who attain the goals expected by the time they start Year 1 is smaller than average. Steady progress continues in Key Stage 1, which means that by the age of seven the proportion reaching Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is still below that achieved nationally.

Last year's test results showed that the pupils made exceptional progress in Key Stage 2, and exceeded the challenging targets that had been set. Almost all of them reached the standard expected for eleven-year olds, although a smaller proportion reached a higher level. Because the pupils' progress is carefully and systematically tracked, teachers took swift steps to help any pupils who fell behind. Given the outstanding results, the booster classes for the Year 6 pupils and other strategies were clearly effective.

Results in Year 9 improved in 2006, confirming an upward trend. Pupils made better progress across the key stage than in previous years. Although the results are lower than the national figure and fall short of the academy's targets, most students built successfully on what they had achieved at the age of eleven.

Standards for sixteen-year olds are below national averages but catching up rapidly. In 2006, almost a half of the Year 11 students achieved five or more higher grade GCSE passes. Almost twice as many students as the year before achieved higher grades in both English and mathematics. Given their starting points, the year group achieved very well. The academy's challenging targets were surpassed.

Standards in the sixth form are in line with national averages in the vocational subjects but below in the academic. The sports course attracts a very large entry and achievement in this, and other vocational subjects, is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well-being are good. Students throughout the age range take on leadership roles that make a significant contribution to their social development. Spiritual, cultural and moral development is also good with assemblies celebrating diversity and raising awareness of moral issues.

Behaviour is good in the primary phase. In the secondary phase, behaviour has improved considerably. Students say 'There is a lot more respect for other people's feelings, a lot less bullying and no graffiti.' The behaviour of secondary students is satisfactory overall. In the vast majority of lessons behaviour is good and generally students behave well moving around the site and when they mix at break, lunch time and in out-of-hours activities. In a few lessons, however, the poor attitudes of a minority disrupted learning for others. There are good strategies to reduce poor behaviour, driving towards the academy's target of having no exclusions at all. The number of exclusions for unacceptable behaviour has reduced dramatically.

The procedures for encouraging attendance have proved to be effective. Attendance continues to improve and is now good. During the last school year attendance was average. In the first few weeks of this school year, attendance is above average and Year 7 students' attendance runs at an impressive 98%, showing their enthusiasm at the start of their secondary education.

Students enthuse about the sports specialist provision and appreciate the out-of-hours sports activities and matches on offer. Secondary students with particular sporting talents are identified and join the Centre of Excellence. This project challenges them considerably, gives them extra responsibility and helps to improve attitudes to learning generally. Students have been particularly successful in table tennis tournaments. The resilience of students ascending the academy's climbing wall is most impressive.

Around the school there is a strong adult presence. As one student commented, 'There are teachers everywhere. It gives you a good feeling because it makes you feel safe.'

Relationships are generally good-humoured and friendly. Students can turn to a variety of adults for support, including the Student and Family Education workers. Students are encouraged to be healthy by the strong emphasis on physical education and by the healthy food available at breakfast as well as at lunch time. The improved Year 11 results mean that students are satisfactorily prepared for their future economic well-being, though the enterprise specialism does not yet make much contribution to this aspect of their personal development.

In general, sixth form students enjoy the courses that they have chosen. They are encouraged to be role models within the school community and take their responsibilities seriously, for example, by supporting younger pupils and contributing to sporting events. However, although their views are sought, their wider decision-making role is underdeveloped.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Good teaching underpinned the improved results in 2006 across the academy. The most dramatic improvements were in the Year 6 results and some teaching in the primary phase has been outstanding. There are also growing strengths in the secondary phase. Currently, the quality of teaching overall is satisfactory, reflecting the relatively high proportion of new and inexperienced staff.

Typically, teachers prepare well for their lessons. The plans pay good attention to what the pupils will learn, as well as what teachers will teach, and take account of different needs. In the secondary phase, however, the plans do not always indicate how support staff can best make a difference to the pupils' learning. Nor do they always show how those at the early stage of learning English can effectively be included in the lesson.

Good relationships exist between staff and pupils and this usually sets the foundation for effective learning. Creative approaches in the primary phase engage the pupils and make them eager to learn. Encouragement, good humour and the skilful use of ICT resources created a positive atmosphere in the secondary phase. In most lessons, students approached their work in a mature, businesslike manner and showed some enthusiasm and enjoyment. However, there were a few lessons when secondary students were prevented from learning because the teacher did not deal with inappropriate behaviour quickly or effectively enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The curriculum throughout the primary phase is broad and well balanced. There is a good emphasis on literacy and communication skills in tandem with promoting creativity.

Work in the Foundation Stage is planned to cover the areas of learning with an appropriate emphasis at this stage of the year on developing communication and social skills. There are many good examples in the primary years, where literacy and mathematical skills are applied when learning about other subjects. The opportunity to draw on expertise and specialised resources available within the academy is enhancing primary pupils' learning; for example in English, mathematics, Spanish, music, drama, and design and technology.

The secondary phase curriculum is satisfactory. Until recently there have been minor anomalies in its organisation; for example variations in the allocation of time to subjects. These are well on the way to being resolved.

The sixth form curriculum lacks breadth and balance, and is inadequate. It offers only a limited range of courses. Although some courses are successfully established, the programme offered does not meet the needs and aspirations of students. The curriculum has insufficient enrichment and wider opportunities to actively foster the students' personal development and broaden their experiences. The lack of independent study facilities and 'social space' for sixth form students are significant shortcomings.

The academy has been successful in using its specialist status in sports to influence the curriculum and promote sporting excellence. There are tangible signs of its impact across the whole academy. However, the enterprise specialism has been slower to take hold. The new vice-principal has made a rapid start in establishing the way forward and has begun a programme of professional development training in enterprise throughout the academy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The care, guidance and support for all students up to Year 11 are good. The academy is achieving its aim that a wide variety of staff play a positive part in supporting students' progress.

A strong feature of the academy is the support for different groups of students with diverse needs. The academy uses a number of effective strategies including: specialist support for literacy; 'learning managers and leaders' who mentor every single student; specialist teaching to help pupils at the early stages of learning English to develop linguistic skills; and a very comprehensive and efficient programme of support for vulnerable students. All these projects are well organised and managed. However, the

demands on staff are great: currently there is not the capacity to monitor the effectiveness of support programmes for students learning English as an additional language, except for those at the very earliest stages.

Child protection procedures are of good quality. Policies and procedures are clear. They are understood throughout the academy due, in large measure, to very effective professional development provided by the designated Child Protection Officer. Features include the emphasis on early identification of students requiring help and the skilled management of the support provided by external agencies.

Students are involved in identifying personal learning targets and assessing their progress. Most students interviewed during the inspection could explain what their targets were and how they get feedback on how well they are doing. A comprehensive range of review processes takes place throughout the year involving parents, teachers and any other adults who have had an influence on a student's progress. A key feature of this process is the sharing of information and promoting the idea of partnership to enable the student to 'have a say' in their development.

The academy has developed an impressive 'student leader' scheme where students of all ages help to model, and maintain, the principles which underpin the general life of the academy. Some student leaders act as peer mentors, giving time to those who need reassurance, help or advice. There is a strong interest in these roles. Student leaders undergo a rigorous selection process including interviews, training and regular performance review.

Care, guidance and support for sixth form students are satisfactory overall. Year 11 pupils are given suitable guidance on sixth form options and students value the careers advice provided. Attendance is carefully monitored and systems are in place to track student progress in individual subjects. However, overall systems for evaluating student progress are under-developed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The principal, headteacher and vice-principals form a strong and effective team. They take self-evaluation very seriously and face up to weaknesses uncompromisingly. They search out areas of underperformance, helped by an increasingly informative and accessible database tracking students' attainment. They actively plan ways to combat underperformance in their determination to raise achievement, improve standards and promote a love of learning amongst their students. This very skilled leadership has already achieved vastly improved standards in Year 6 and Year 11.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory overall. The senior team identified weaknesses and acted decisively to address them. Although the academy has been unable to appoint a director for post-16 education, interim leadership arrangements are in place. Systems for day-to-day management are satisfactory. Monitoring of provision is not sufficiently rigorous. Much needs to be done in the

shorter term to strengthen the sixth form curriculum. Longer term plans are well reasoned.

The chair of governors actively supports the academy, regularly visiting and taking an interest in the students' learning. Governors are involved in evaluating the work of the academy through their committees and, where appropriate, by attending leadership team meetings.

The academy's monitoring programme and evaluation procedures serve the senior team's needs well. Inspectors conducted joint observations of teaching with members of the academy's leadership team. These confirmed that the senior team's appraisal of quality and improvements needed was sound. Given the turnover in staff, it is crucial that the academy sets clear expectations for staff and reinforces these consistently. The fact that newly arrived teachers already adopt the 'house style' when planning learning and in the structure of their lessons, illustrates that this happens.

The Learning Gateway, an ICT networked resource, enables staff to access quickly updated information about students, events, policies or teaching resources. The academy is in the process of devising an all-through curriculum to sustain good momentum in learning and to capitalise on the wide-ranging skills of staff working in the academy and its partner organisations. There are joint subject leader meetings and staff meetings across the phases, and regular and reliable transfer of information between phases.

The new building adds an extra dimension to the working lives of staff and students, giving a sense of cohesion to the many partners that share the facilities. Day-to-day management of this complex building runs very smoothly. All staff contribute to the welcoming positive ethos that pervades the academy.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	Academy Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	4
How well does the academy work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3	
The effectiveness of the academy's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this academy require special measures?	No	
Does this academy require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

We really enjoyed our visit to your academy. Many thanks for our warm welcome. We learnt a lot from talking with you and the staff, and joining your lessons and activities. We were thrilled to see the huge improvements since our first HMI visit over a year ago.

You should be very proud of everyone's achievements. Those of you who were in Year 6 last summer did brilliantly in your tests, thanks to clever teaching and your good attendance at booster classes. Those of you who were in Year 9 did well. Your GCSE results were really good. The principal, the headteacher and the academy leadership team have worked very hard and it's paying off. Your staff work closely together so that they can give you any extra help or advice that you need.

There aren't the right courses in the sixth form for everyone. Your staff know that there are problems. They have made sensible changes and recognise that more are needed.

We were impressed by the competent way that your academy student leaders take responsibilities. Nearly everyone behaves well. Sadly, a few secondary students with poor attitudes spoilt a few lessons. This is not fair on other students. Your staff will take steps to make sure that this does not continue.

Your academy is remarkable. Very few schools have primary, secondary, sixth form and special school students sharing accommodation and activities. It was good to see you all mixing so well in your brand new building.

We hope that your academy, with your help, just keeps getting better and better.

Brenda Cusdin

HMI