



London Academy

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134798
Inspection number 300245
Inspection dates 26–27 February 2007
Reporting inspector Robert Ellis HMI

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

Type of school	Academy	School address	Spur Road
School category	Non-maintained		Edgware
Age range of pupils	11–18		HA8 8BT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8238 1100
Number on roll (school)	1319	Fax number	020 8905 4193
Number on roll (6th form)	314		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Peter Shalson
		Principal	Mr Phil Hearne
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	26–27 February 2007	300245

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

London Academy, which has joint specialisms of Business, Enterprise and ICT, opened in September 2004 in the original buildings of the former Edgware School in the London Borough of Barnet. It moved to its present purpose-built accommodation in September 2006. The academy is oversubscribed and has a growing sixth form. It is larger than most secondary schools and there are more boys than girls. In most year groups, boys outnumber girls by as much as 3:2. The academy serves some of the most socially deprived wards in the country. Almost half the students of compulsory school age are entitled to free school meals, a proportion which is higher than in most schools. Over half of the students are from minority ethnic groups, the main groups are of Asian and Black African heritage and over one third of the students have a first language other than English. A similar percentage has learning difficulties and/or disabilities, a proportion which is much higher than in most secondary schools. The academy is a local authority-designated base for 30 students who have speech and communication difficulties. The academy has previously encountered difficulties in recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff but at present there are no significant vacancies. The principal has been granted a one-term sabbatical leave and during his absence the associate principal is acting principal in his place.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The academy rightly recognises that it provides a good education for its students. It has improved significantly over the last few years and now provides outstanding provision in a number of areas.

Students join the academy with standards that are below average overall, and initial weaknesses in literacy impede the learning of many students. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are rising but are below national figures. Results in GCSE examinations in 2006 were in line with the national average. Standards are rising and, given their starting points, the students' achievement is good and increasingly outstanding.

Personal development and well-being are good because students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Students enjoy learning and are safe and well cared for because care guidance and support are outstanding. They say that they are proud of the academy. Most students have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is good. The number of students excluded from the academy is lower than in most schools because it has very good procedures for supporting students at risk of exclusion. Attendance is satisfactory and improving.

The curriculum is outstanding and allows students to choose courses that meet their needs and interests and is enriched by a broad range of activities which develop the students' confidence and self-esteem. Students make good progress in lessons and most are on course to meet or exceed challenging individual targets. Teaching is good overall and some lessons are outstanding. However, the academy recognises that some teaching requires development and a few lessons are inadequate. Students say that they get good guidance and support which enables them to prepare for the next stages in their education.

Most parents are supportive, feel well informed about their children's progress, and value the opportunities that the academy provides for their children to achieve well.

The academy is exceptionally well led and managed. The senior leadership has a clear vision for the future of the academy and high expectations of what the students can achieve. Senior leaders monitor the work of the academy and have an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development. The academy has excellent facilities and makes good use of them. The positive impact of actions taken and the rapid pace of improvement since the academy opened demonstrate that it has outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The negative impact of recent challenging events, which might have been expected to slow the rate of progress of the academy, has been limited by the appropriate actions taken and the support of the whole academy community.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards in the sixth form have improved rapidly and the academy provides a good quality of education for its students. Many students achieve below average at GCSE level and as a result standards on entry to the sixth form are generally lower than those seen in most secondary schools. However, most make good progress in relation to their starting points. Teaching in the sixth form is good and in many subjects students are enabled to make outstanding progress.

Numbers in the sixth form have increased rapidly and most Year 11 students continue their education at the academy. The curriculum meets the needs and interests of all students and the range of courses is broad and provides good opportunities for progression from Year 11.

There are good opportunities for students to take responsibility and to contribute to the academy and the wider community. Sixth-form students are generally good role models and many are involved in activities to support younger students. Advice, guidance and support are outstanding and this enables students to develop their skills and self-esteem so that they become mature and confident young adults. Sixth-form students speak very positively about their experiences and appreciate the time and effort that staff give to enable their learning and development. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

* Ensure all teaching is consistently as good as the best.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' attainment on entry is below average, particularly in literacy. Students achieve well in Key Stage 3. In 2006 the percentage of students gaining the expected Level 5 and above in national tests was 60% in English, 68% in mathematics and 56% in science. These are below the national average but analysis shows a rising trends in all three subjects and this represents good progress in relation to students' starting points.

GCSE results are improving and 51% of students achieved the equivalent of 5 A* - C grades in 2006 with 32% achieving 5 A* - C including mathematics and English, and almost all students achieved at least one entry level qualification. Analysis of the academy's data demonstrates that these students made very good progress in relation to their starting points.

Standards are below average in some subjects but they are rising and some students make outstanding progress from low starting points. This represents good achievement overall.

In lessons students make good progress as a result of their positive attitudes and the good teaching they receive.

There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of students, including those who have learning difficulties and disabilities and those who do not speak English as a first language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development of students is good. They enjoy coming to school and attendance is at the national average and improving. Relationships between students and between students and adults are good. The academy has high expectations for student behaviour and the vast majority behave very well. Those students who step out of line are dealt with fairly and effectively.

Students take advantage of the good provision for adopting healthy lifestyles. For example, many take part in the sporting activities organised after school and at lunchtime. The academy's caterers have also responded well to the students' request for healthy eating options. The academy has a well planned and co-ordinated personal social and health education programme. This helps ensure that the moral and social development of students is excellent. Students are involved in a range of charity events. During the inspection the student council was organising the academy's involvement in the forthcoming 'red nose day'. Students' cultural and spiritual development is also outstanding and many opportunities are taken to celebrate the cultural diversity within the academy. Students make excellent contributions to both the academy and the local community through opportunities in the curriculum and other activities. For example, Year 10 students have led a community table tennis project as part of enterprise pathways. The student council is also very active and their views and opinions are regularly sought and acted upon. The academy's enterprise programme and business activities prepare students well for the next stage in their education and for working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors' evidence confirms the academy's view that that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching, when combined with students' positive attitudes and the excellent care and guidance is contributing to students making good progress, often from a modest base. The academy recognises that there is a small amount of weaker teaching where improvement is needed. Throughout the academy, it is evident that teachers are working together as a team to ensure that what they do in lessons

can have a maximum impact on students' learning. Senior leaders have made significant investments in teaching and learning through training and use of research, all of which is focused on raising attainment. Senior leaders and middle managers reinforce the academy's approach to maximising learning by using very well the comprehensive teaching and learning policy, a key document.

In most lessons, students are encouraged to become independent learners, planning carefully reflects the needs of individual students, learning objectives are precise and are shared with students, relationships are very good, pace is brisk. Students make good progress in these lessons because they are actively involved and teachers constantly assess their grasp of the work before introducing a new concept or moving on. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used extensively and there is a strong sense of enterprise in the majority of lessons. The academy's specialisms of Business, Enterprise and ICT, are used well to hold students' interests and stimulate thinking.

In the few weaker lessons activities do not engage students. Their progress is slow when insufficient attention is given to what or how they should learn. Low-level disruption affected a few lessons, particularly when assessment of students' learning needs and progress was weak.

The quality of marking is generally good and there are examples of outstanding practices. For example, in art, assessment is used rigorously to raise standards. Across the academy, end-of-unit assessment work is carefully marked and students make good use of self-assessment to evaluate critically their learning. However, there are inconsistencies in the day-to-day marking particularly as basic technical errors are missed, mediocre work is sometimes given undue praise and teachers do not always indicate what students should do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and is enhanced by the academy's specialisms and the wide range of enrichment activities. The integration of business, enterprise and ICT is very well developed and has a significant impact on developing students' confidence and resilience as independent learners. The academy constantly reviews and develops its curriculum, ensuring that it meets students' needs very well and is responsive to the rich cultural and diverse needs of the student population. Opportunities are available for students to gain academic qualifications in their first language and aspects of students' cultural heritages are embedded in schemes of work.

A significant strength of the academy is the breadth and exceptional flexibility of the Key Stage 4 and sixth form curriculum. These have been broadened to include a wider range of academic and vocational courses as well as opportunities for work-related learning. This is because the academy keeps the needs of students under review and carries out appropriate research into the labour market to find out how best to prepare students for the world of work. The academy has amended the timetable, thereby

creating greater flexibility for combining vocational and academic subjects. This is enabling all students to gain a wide range of accredited qualifications as they progress through the academy. The Learning Support Unit provides a carefully tailored curriculum to support the most vulnerable students in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Staff know the students very well and provide them with outstanding care. Vulnerable students are given particularly good quality support through the Learning Support Unit, the academy's mentoring programme and through effective links with a range of external agencies. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are also provided with very good support and guidance. This ensures that they make good progress in their learning.

There are excellent relationships within the academy and students are confident that adults will help them if they are worried or distressed. Students feel safe and they report that there are only very rare instances of bullying and these are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Arrangements for students' health and safety are robust and effective. Suitable systems for child protection are in place, backed by staff training. Students are guided well in choosing options and making decisions in preparation for future studies or employment.

The academy sets suitably challenging targets for all students and their progress towards these targets is monitored well. A range of effective support is provided to those students who are identified as underachieving. These systems have played an important role in raising achievement within the academy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The academy has made remarkable progress in establishing a positive ethos, in raising achievement and improving provision.

The principal has established a clear strategic vision for the development of the academy and is passionate about its improvement. His determination underpins the academy's relentless drive to raise standards and to provide the best possible outcomes for students, both in terms of their well-being and achievement. In his absence the acting principal has ensured that there has been no break in the outstanding leadership and management of the academy. The work of the academy has, from its outset, focused sharply on raising the aspirations of the students by dismantling barriers to their learning and empowering them to achieve well. This is epitomised by the academy's aim for 'students to be among the leaders for tomorrow'.

The complementary strengths of senior managers are well deployed in the senior leadership team. Although several subject leaders are new in post, middle leadership is also strong. This is because the development needs of leaders are very well supported, and because the academy has excellent systems for monitoring and evaluating its own work. The internal and external reviews are rigorous and robustly self critical. They ensure that there is accountability at all levels and that subsequent action planning guides specific improvements and whole-academy initiatives. Assessment information underpins this self-evaluation and is effectively used to identify and address areas of underachievement.

Development planning is sharply focused and yet responsive to the academy's regular self scrutiny. The academy is constantly seeking ways to strengthen provision, for example by extending its vocational centre and widening its community use. In addition, it works hard to strengthen links with parents and to respond to their views.

The governing body is well informed and has an accurate understanding of the academy's work. Governors provide good support for the academy and monitor its progress carefully. Several governors give generously of their time and are regular visitors.

The academy makes very good use of external support and works closely with a range of partners, both local and distant. The academy is flexible and resourceful in applying research-findings in order to promote learners' well-being and achievement. It has successfully addressed the challenge of recruitment and retention by carefully nurturing the skills and leadership of its own staff. The strong leadership and cohesive staff demonstrate excellent capacity to sustain its improvement.

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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>	School 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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
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 school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection. Our particular thanks to those of you who talked to us about your work and gave us your views of the academy.

You said that the academy is a good place to learn and I am pleased to say that we agree. Most of you make good progress and an increasing number make outstanding progress.

We saw how well you get on with each other and with the adults who work with you, and how well you look after the new building and equipment. You told us that you enjoy being at school and feel safe and well looked after. We noticed that many of you like eating healthy food and understand the benefits of exercise and healthy lifestyles. Most of you are keen to learn and are making good progress, but a few of you don't get involved enough in your lessons and expect the teachers to keep you on track.

You are very fortunate that the people who have responsibility for making decisions about your academy have a clear picture of what it does well and what needs to improve. They work hard to encourage you to play your part in continuing to make the academy a better place to learn and achieve.

There are many things which are already improving rapidly and some are already outstanding and the people in charge have some good ideas about how things can be better still. We think that the academy should continue to focus on developing teaching that all lessons are as good as the best, so that you are able to work as hard as you can in every subject and learn as well as you can.

I am sure that if you all continue to work together and support the academy you can help make even better.

Thank you again for helping us with our work and making our visit to London Academy so enjoyable.

Robert EllisHMI