

Prospects Learning Services
Prospects Services LTD
19 Elmfield Road
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1LT

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Direct T 020 8315 1250
www.ofsted.gov.uk Direct F 020 8315 1279



20 June 2008

Mrs Catharine Loxton
Principal
Harris Academy Bermondsey
55 Southwark Park Road
London
SE16 3TZ

Dear Mrs Loxton

Academies Initiative: Monitoring Visit to Harris Academy Bermondsey

Introduction

Following my visit with Margaret Dickinson HMI to your academy on 4 and 5 June 2008, 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 students' work and met with the principal and two vice principals, members of the subject leadership team and other coordinators, a range of other staff, groups of students, a representative of the sponsors and an academies advisor from the DCSF.

Context

The academy opened in September 2006 with a specialism in enterprise; a second specialism in media was added in September 2007. It is an oversubscribed all-girls school serving an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage; just over three fifths of students are eligible to claim free school meals, over four times the national average. The academy is part of a federation with five other Harris academies in south London. The academy was awarded Investors in People status in April 2008. The academy site and buildings are undergoing a major improvement and development programme scheduled for completion in August 2008.

There are 888 students on roll. Almost half are of Black heritage and about a quarter are from White British backgrounds. A significant proportion of students are at an early stage of learning English. About a third have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is well above the national average. The academy educates a high proportion of vulnerable students. While there is currently no post-16 provision, the academy is planning to introduce a sixth form in September 2009. While staff recruitment can be difficult, staff retention rates are good and turnover is relatively low.

Achievement and standards

Students join the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment that are very low. While standards in the end-of-Key Stage 3 national tests in 2007 were significantly lower than average, students made outstanding progress in English and good progress in mathematics. Overall, the progress students make from the beginning of Key Stage 3 to the end of Key Stage 4 is among the highest nationally.

Attainment overall is significantly below average. Standards are highest in English where the academy reached its challenging targets at the end of Key Stage 3. The proportion of students gaining at least five A*-C grades at GCSE in 2007 was close to the national average and exceeded the target set. However, the proportion gaining five or more A*-C including English and mathematics was significantly below that found nationally.

While attainment remains below average, particularly in mathematics and science, standards are rising and the rate of progress students make is accelerating. The academy's tracking data indicates that standards at GCSE will rise further in 2008, particularly the proportion of students attaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Staff and students share a strong commitment to helping ensure the academy continues to improve and speak about it with real enthusiasm and pride. Students say they feel very safe and appreciate the way staff support them and are always there to listen, especially when they are facing difficulties in their lives. Older students are proud of the many improvements they say have happened since the academy opened. One example they give is the students' good behaviour which has been brought about by the academy's clear and consistent procedures which recognise and reward good behaviour. As a result the number of exclusions is reducing. The academy's core values which emphasise achievement, enjoyment and respect are also having a positive impact on students' lives. Attendance is above average and improving and there has been a marked increase in the number of students rewarded for 100% attendance. Thanks to a concerted effort, punctuality is also improving. Students have good social skills and enjoy working collaboratively. They are confident, sensitive and show good initiative. These positive attributes mean they make a strong contribution to academy life and are genuine partners in the academy's improvement.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is good. During the visit ten parts of lessons were observed: two were outstanding, five were good, two were satisfactory and one was inadequate. Good teaching is characterised by brisk pace, good use of time limits and work which is well planned to challenge students and engage their interest. Relationships throughout the academy are good and students have positive attitudes to learning. Students react positively to teachers' high expectations and most enjoy learning. In the best lessons, teachers use praise, humour and encouragement very well and students respond by working with enthusiasm and confidence. At the beginning of these lessons, teachers ensure students know what they are to learn and are clear about how their work will be assessed. Teachers make good use of partner and group working to encourage students to discuss their work, clarify their ideas and extend their learning. Where teaching is less effective students are not given enough opportunity to work together and time is not sufficiently well managed and the pace of learning is too slow. In these lessons activities were not well matched to what students were expected to learn.

Teachers say they welcome the programme of regular lesson observations carried out by members of the senior management team, subject leaders and colleagues. They particularly value the resulting professional development and dialogue. Open discussion and a meaningful exchange of ideas is a defining feature of the academy's work and a catalyst for improvement.

The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of students. There is a clear and appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy whilst also enabling students to follow vocational options. The academy's specialisms of enterprise and media have resulted in a highly effective curriculum focus on developing essential skills such as team working, innovation and communication. These have resulted in students' growing self-confidence and good levels of engagement with learning. Following recent appointments, the academy is well placed to capitalise further on its specialisms in order to develop the curriculum and enhance the lives of its students. The Aim Higher and mentoring schemes are well established and successful in encouraging students to set their sights high, and an increasing number are moving on to further education and training at the end of Year 11. Students speak highly of the additional opportunities they have, such as the educational visits, preparing for adult life days and the Saturday Kitchen.

Students say they feel well supported and very well cared for. Staff are very accessible and many students regard the academy as a haven of safety, stability and tranquillity in a sometimes troubled environment. Students are well known and valued as individuals and the academy ensures very good support for their diverse needs. Arrangements for the care and induction of new students, particularly those new to English is very well planned and is effective in helping them settle quickly.

Leadership and management

The academy benefits hugely from the determined, dynamic and inspirational leadership of its principal who is very well supported by her two vice principals. Together they have fostered a spirit of adventure and optimism so that all members of the academy community are eager contributors to school improvement. Subject leaders and other middle managers have drawn up comprehensive summaries of actions in their subjects and have good plans for further improvement. However, their views on achievement place too much emphasis on changes in provision and not enough on tracking the progress students make or on outcomes.

When asked where the drive for school improvement came from, subject leaders were quick to recognise the vision and commitment of the principal but on reflection concluded that a key factor in turning vision and energy into reality is the shared sense of commitment, enthusiasm and teamwork which pervades the whole academy. The skills developed through the academy's specialisms are used well by staff and students to ensure there is a positive approach to collaborative working and problem solving. By working together, the academy has created an excellent ethos for learning and a real sense of joint endeavour. These skills will make a good contribution to students future economic well-being. Staff and students embrace debate and innovation, as evidenced in the mentor group trials for mixed-age (vertical) tutor groups and the planned introduction of a vertical curriculum which is designed to improve motivation and recognise achievement. Plans for the introduction of sixth form provision in 2009 are at an appropriate stage of development.

There is a very good commitment to the continuing professional development of staff which is reflected in a desire to continue to improve teaching and learning and do the very best for all students. The senior leadership team is particularly effective in celebrating outstanding practice and challenging and supporting where teaching is not good enough.

The ongoing refurbishment of the site and the accompanying building work has been very well managed in order to minimise its impact on learning.

The academy's self-evaluation is robust and accurate and is used well to inform its strategic development plan. Because of this and because the actions it has already taken are proving effective in raising standards the academy has an outstanding capacity for improvement.

External support

The academy has made judicious use of support from the federation. It has used the wide range of available expertise very well to support its improvement, provide professional development and to supplement its own resources.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen students' future economic well-being and options by raising standards further, particularly in mathematics and science
- Improve the use of tracking data so that subject leaders and middle managers have a clearer view of students' year-on-year progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett

Robert Lovett
HM Inspector of Schools

cc chair of governors
the Academies Group, DCSF