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11 November 2010

Mrs C A Alcock  
Principal  
Harris Academy Purley  
Kendra Hall Road  
South Croydon  
CR2 6DT

Dear Mrs Alcock

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Harris Academy Purley**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit to your academy with Angela Corbett HMI on 9 and 10 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

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

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, visited 21 lessons, met with the Principal, federation chief executive officer and staff. The lead inspector also held a telephone conversation with the academy's School Improvement Partner. Informal conversations were held with students in lessons and during breaks.

### **Context**

Around one quarter of the 807 students who attend the academy are of White British heritage and the remainder are from diverse minority ethnic groups. Girls make up around two fifths of the student population. The overall proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is twice the national average. More students have special educational needs and/or disabilities than is typical for a school of this size. The academy has a relatively stable student population and is oversubscribed for the 2011 entry, but there are currently places available in some year groups. The majority of staff transferred from the predecessor school and the academy experienced some staff turbulence in its first year. The recently established

sixth form has 32 students and operates as part of a collaborative arrangement with other academies from the Harris Federation. The academy is housed in the buildings of the predecessor school but there are plans for a building programme and further refurbishment. The academy's specialisms are in enterprise and sports.

### **Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning**

The majority of students start at the academy having achieved well below average standards at their previous schools. In the academy's first year 47% of students achieved five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C including both English and mathematics. Although just below the national average, this represents good progress in relation to their starting points. The academy's tracking data and inspectors' observations of students' work in lessons show that a rapidly increasing proportion of students are on track to achieve or exceed very challenging targets. The quality of learning is good and improving rapidly because of good and sometimes outstanding teaching, improved attendance and students' increasingly positive attitudes to learning.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Behaviour in classrooms is generally good. There has been a marked decline in the number of incidents involving inappropriate behaviour and a similar reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions. Attendance and punctuality have improved rapidly with attendance now above average. Increasing numbers of students are grasping the opportunities offered to take responsibility as, for example, specialism leaders who promote the academy's specialisms. Students express positive views about the academy.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

When the academy first opened it judged that too much teaching was inadequate and there was not enough that was good or better. Rigorous and systematic monitoring of teaching and learning identified strengths and weaknesses and a variety of means were used to rapidly improve the profile of teaching. Improvements mean that teachers now have higher expectations of students and lesson planning takes good account of their prior attainment. Many lessons are taught at a brisk pace and teachers use a good range of resources and different activities to engage and challenge students. Although many teachers use effective questioning to gauge understanding and develop learning, in a few lessons questions are not targeted sufficiently at the different abilities within the class. In the best practice, which is seen in the majority of lessons, students get good feedback. Most marking identifies strengths, targets for improvement and how these targets can be achieved. However, in a few cases marking provides too little guidance on how work can be improved or developed and does not refer to what students were expected to learn. In the best lessons, imaginative use of interactive whiteboards contributes strongly

to students' learning and enjoyment as well as providing them with helpful hints and tips.

The curriculum has been developed significantly so that it meets the needs of students and is increasingly personalised. Most impact is evident at Key Stage 4 where detailed pathways for students to follow have been established to ensure all students, regardless of their ability or starting points, can develop their skills, knowledge and understanding and make the progress of which they are capable. Good progress has been made in promoting the enterprise specialism but development of the sports specialism is at an early stage. The specialisms are broadening students' experiences and developing important life skills such as leadership and endeavour.

Students are cared for very well. Pastoral care is extremely well organised and the academy can demonstrate many notable successes in improving behaviour, attendance and achievement for particular individuals.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers**

The academy is led exceptionally well. The Principal and senior team have an ambitious vision for the academy and they have been successful in inspiring staff and students who now share a common sense of purpose.

The academy has secured exceptional improvement in the short time since it was established and the positive impact of the actions taken demonstrate an outstanding capacity for further improvement. Self-evaluation is very accurate and, consequently, those responsible for leading the academy have an exceptionally clear picture of its strengths and areas for development. The management and development of staff is exemplary and there has been a dramatic improvement in the quality of teaching. Senior leaders have unflinchingly challenged poor performance and provided high quality professional development opportunities which have been valued by staff. Middle leadership is being developed rapidly and the work of middle leaders is starting to have a positive impact on accelerating the pace of improvement. Governors are well informed and holding the academy to account. For example, they have looked closely at the academy's self-evaluation and challenged senior leaders' judgements. External consultants were used to verify the self-evaluation and to confirm an accurate baseline from which future progress can be measured.

The academy's improvement plan is based on rigorous and systematic evaluation of performance data. There are clear priorities for improvement that address weaknesses and areas for improvement. Actions taken by the academy are managed well and quality assured to ensure that they have maximum impact on improving outcomes for students.

### **External support**

The Harris Federation makes a strong contribution to all aspects of the academy's work. There is excellent support for subject teams through networks that enable the sharing of resources and good practice. Productive relationships have been developed with outside agencies to promote students well-being.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Build on improvements to leadership and management at middle leadership level so that leaders and managers are further empowered and enabled to drive improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**