

Harris Academy Merton

Wide Way, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 1BP

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students make outstanding progress. Despite arriving with attainment that is below the national average, key measures of attainment at the end of Year 11 have been significantly higher than national averages over recent years. Levels of literacy, numeracy and communication skills are very high, but too few students read widely for pleasure.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Approaches to learning are based on strategies that reflect students' needs and play to their strengths. This ensures consistently high-quality learning in all classrooms. The leadership of the school manages the performance of all staff rigorously and accepts nothing less than consistently good teaching.
- The behaviour of students around the site and in classrooms is exemplary. There is a tremendously positive culture of learning and a very strong sense of community. Pride in their academy is shared by students, and teaching and support staff.
- The leadership of the academy maintains very high standards. The appropriately high expectations of students and staff generate exceptional achievement. Leaders at all levels show imagination and initiative in response to challenges, and work together with high levels of consistency and coherence to well-understood academy-wide values and principles.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Provision is currently changing from having an accent on vocational provision to having a higher proportion of students following A and AS-level courses. This is being managed very well but performance in these academic courses has yet to rise to the outstanding achievement shown by students in BTEC qualifications.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons, including several jointly with senior staff.
- Meetings took place with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and the chief executive officer of the Harris Federation, and students.
- The academy’s self-evaluation and development planning documents, policies and safeguarding procedures were scrutinised.
- There were 28 responses to Parent View by the end of the inspection visit. The views of parents were also obtained by an analysis of the academy’s parental surveys.
- The views of 91 staff who returned questionnaires were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Alan Taylor-Bennett, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Lynne Kauffman	Additional inspector
Lesley Leek	Additional inspector
Brenda Watson	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is an average-sized secondary school. It is part of the Harris Federation. Sixth form students move between this academy and others in the federation to attend classes.
- About 28% of students are disabled or have special educational needs: this is a larger proportion than that seen nationally. Fifteen per cent are supported through school action, and 13.5% at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. These proportions are both above national averages.
- Nearly 40% of its students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This is significantly above the national average.
- The academy serves an ethnically diverse community. The largest ethnic group is Black or Black British and there is a significant number of Asian and Asian British students.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Adapt the curriculum in the sixth form to the continually changing needs of students and strengthen provision in AS and A2 courses to enable outstanding achievement in all level 3 courses.
- Inculcate a love of reading in students by coordinating opportunities across all areas of the curriculum for this activity to be given status and shown value.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students' attainment has been well above the national average over the last three years: the average point score achieved by students in GCSE and equivalent courses has been consistently very high. Nearly all students obtained five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above over the last two years. The proportion of students achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics rose dramatically, to be significantly above average in 2011. Although it dipped in 2012 due to a smaller proportion than expected obtaining grade C in English, it remained above average.
- These impressive outcomes are achieved despite students arriving at the academy with attainment below the national average. This is because they make outstanding progress, due to the very strong culture of learning and the outstanding teaching. Progress in English has been outstanding over the last three years; despite results in 2012 falling below those in 2011, they still represent part of a strong upward trend, and the quality of learning in English lessons throughout the academy is very high. Students' progress in mathematics was exceptionally strong in 2011 and strengthened further in 2012 with students achieving nearly a whole grade higher on average than their peers nationally.
- Typically, lessons involve students paying very close attention to the guidance of the teacher, and displaying a quiet but tangible enthusiasm for learning. For example, in an outstanding mathematics lesson observed, students who had previously struggled with the subject were handling complex calculations with increasing confidence because of the very clear direction given by the teacher. They clearly enjoyed their grasp of the work becoming rapidly more secure, and they relished the high level of challenge involved.
- The academy manages the achievement of all potentially vulnerable groups with great care. As a consequence, the achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is strong: nearly all achieve five good GCSEs. A very high proportion of students with English as an additional language make exceptionally good progress in English and in mathematics. Students who benefit from the pupil premium receive well targeted and effective support, including individual intervention, a literacy breakfast club and the provision of an additional English group in Key Stage 3. Students with previously high levels of attainment made progress broadly in line with expectations in 2011 but the significant improvement in the proportion of GCSE grades awarded at A* or A in 2012 is evidence of the improved rates of progress of this group.
- Attainment in the sixth form is high compared with national averages, despite attainment on entry to Year 12 being below average. The progress made by students in BTEC courses is outstanding, and better than in AS and A levels. The proportion progressing to higher education is climbing rapidly and approaching the national average.
- The great majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View feel that their children make at least good progress at the academy and this view was reflected in other parent surveys that had been undertaken. Inspection evidence strongly supports such positive opinions of achievement.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is consistently at least good and much is outstanding. This is because teachers know

how their students learn best, and they adapt their teaching styles appropriately. In some lessons, teaching does not seem to generate strong levels of debate and challenge from students but learning is, nevertheless, very secure and students clearly enjoy responding to teachers' very high expectations of them.

- Teachers' questioning skills, and their use of other strategies to obtain information about students' grasp of the work, are very well developed. Even when questioning is focused more on obtaining specific answers rather than generating greater insight, it is used skilfully and energetically to maintain the momentum of learning and to provide a very strong framework in which the whole class can make at least good progress.
- Students show high levels of responsibility for their own learning. For example, they value the individual progress charts in their exercise books and make good use of them to trigger the need to improve their performance in specific aspects of a subject.
- Teaching in the sixth form has an even better profile than in Years 7 to 11, with a higher proportion that is outstanding. This results in high-quality oral and written work. In the words of one sixth form student, 'They tailor the teaching to your needs here really well – it enables you to do your very best!'
- All teachers approach the teaching and consolidation of cross-curricular skills consistently and effectively. Teaching support students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development strongly and explicitly. In geography, students grapple with the implications of globalisation for the economies of developing countries, in history with the changing nature of masculinity and femininity throughout the ages, and in food and textiles about the fascinating range of food and clothing in different cultures. The daily homily published to students is reinforced throughout the day by staff. The academy is aware of the need to capitalise on students' very good literacy skills to generate a passion for reading across all subjects.
- The quality of marking and feedback is consistently at least good and much is outstanding. This is a consequence of close and frequent monitoring. Students make very good use of the feedback provided.
- Parents and carers expressed high levels of confidence in the quality of teaching and inspection evidence supports this view.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' behaviour is exemplary around the site and in lessons; their attitudes to learning are very positive. In meetings with inspectors, students were keen to reassure them that behaviour is consistently outstanding and that the two days of the inspection were typical in all respects.
 - Students show ambition and they enjoy learning. They are very supportive of each other in lessons, showing a mature respect for each other's views and opinions. Tasks presented in lessons are tackled eagerly, and pleasure is obtained from making rapid and secure progress.
 - Students feel completely safe in the academy. Bullying is very rare and students are entirely confident that it will be tackled when reported to staff. On the few occasions it happens, it usually involves comments on social networking sites; these problems are not brought into school.
 - Students value the strength of their academy community and how differences in backgrounds,
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culture and outlook are valued. One said, 'If someone can't get on with another person from a different background or with a different approach to life, it's they who stand out, not the person who is different in some way.' Any differences in sexual orientation are readily accommodated and alternative viewpoints are shown appropriate respect.

- This tremendously positive learning culture has not come about automatically or by chance; many students come from homes where their parents were not fortunate enough to have such positive experiences of education. The academy has fostered and nurtured this ethos with considerable care and skill; it operates student support systems with very high levels of consistency, ensuring rapid and effective responses to students' problems.
- A large majority of parents and carers expressed satisfaction about students' behaviour and how well the academy tackles any bullying; inspection evidence supports these positive views.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The Principal and his senior team maintain very high expectations of staff and students. They communicate a strong vision clearly and convincingly throughout the academy.
- Leaders and managers at all levels work with high levels of effectiveness and with high degrees of consistency. There is clearly a 'Harris approach' and leaders value the strength this coherence and commonality of purpose gives them.
- Leaders at all levels make decisions in their respective areas of responsibility efficiently and confidently. They feel very high levels of accountability for the quality of outcomes, and have strong monitoring and support systems. This is exemplified in the way in which the quality of teaching is managed. Faculty leaders undertake frequent formal observations of their team; outstanding practice is rapidly identified and propagated throughout the team, and any practice that is not judged as being at least good is addressed swiftly and supportively and subjected to more frequent monitoring to ensure it improves. Leaders' knowledge of the quality and nature of teaching in the academy is, therefore, excellent. It is used to drive highly focused professional development for individuals, within teams, and at academy and cross-academy levels.
- The Harris Federation provides excellent support for the work of the academy. For example, all newly qualified teaching staff across the federation were recently given high-quality training, and there are strong core-subject networks that share best practice between subject leaders across the federation.
- All staff have a range of performance management targets set annually. These are monitored and reviewed, and used to support decisions about pay progression. The performance management of the Principal is conducted by the governing body and the Harris Federation with similar rigour.
- All aspects of self-evaluation are thorough and the insights gained are used to maintain existing strengths and drive further improvement. Development planning is detailed and focused with precision on actions that will have the greatest impact on students' welfare and achievement; it is used to drive the allocation of resources such as the pupil premium with maximum effect.
- The academy tracks the progress of all students in every subject closely. Responses to any

indications of a student underachieving are rapid and effective. This monitoring also ensures equality of opportunity by seeking to ensure high levels of achievement for all groups of students, and the appropriate allocation of resources.

- The curriculum supports very high levels of achievement because it is planned to meet the needs of students. Being part of a federation gives the academy the capacity to meet individual students' needs through specialist provision. The curriculum is continually evaluated and is adapted, for example, in response to the improving levels of achievement of students and the desire to offer them appropriately higher levels of challenge. For example, the balance of courses on offer in the sixth form is being adjusted in response to the higher levels of academic performance in Key Stage 4 over recent years.

■ **The governance of the academy:**

- is highly effective because the governing body has excellent knowledge and understanding of its work
 - fulfils all statutory responsibilities, including ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are of the highest standard in the academy
 - presents high levels of challenge and support to senior staff by holding them to account for the delivery of ambitious targets
 - feels strongly accountable to the Harris Federation, and works closely with it in providing many cross-academy initiatives which enable the academy to be part of something that is, indeed, more than the sum of its parts.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	131897
Local authority	n/a
Inspection number	395678

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1090
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Bayon
Principal	Andy Halpin
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 October 2008
Telephone number	020 86231000
Fax number	020 87647655
Email address	info@harrismerton.org.uk

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