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Ms Lesley Day
Principal
Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich
Homestall Road
London
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Dear Ms Day

Academies Initiative: Monitoring Visit to Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

Introduction

Following my visit with Meena Wood HMI to your academy on 13 and 14 November 2007, 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 met with principal, key staff, groups of students and governors.

Context

The Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich is an 11-19 girls' academy located in the London Borough of Southwark. Attainment on entry is below the national average and the academy has a higher proportion of students who have prior attainment which is significantly below average than in most schools. Students come from areas of high social and economic deprivation and 42% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The majority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and almost half speak English as an additional language. Attendance is low, at just over 90%, and pupil mobility is high.

In September 2006, following a very short development period, the school became an academy sponsored by Lord Harris of Peckham, part of a unique federation of six (to become seven) academies in the South London area all linked by a single trust. A separate boys' academy with the same specialisms is expected to be opened adjacent to the academy in 2010. The academy is operating in the pre-existing buildings of the former Waverley Girls School. There are plans for accommodation to be enhanced with part refurbishment, part demolition and part new-build.

The academy has added specialisms in health sciences and enterprise to complement the sports specialism held by the predecessor school. The academy is a hub for a sports partnership that works in six secondary and 46 primary schools across the borough, offering professional development opportunities and capacity-building interventions in physical education, sport and physical activity.

An inclusion unit was opened in September 2006 which is staffed by specialists to offer 'personalised learning' to those students who are at risk of exclusion or underperformance.

The sixth form, which started in September 2007, is small with only 36 students, but this is an area which the academy plans to develop. It is intended that once the proposed partner boys' school is operating the sixth form will operate jointly across both sites with places for up to 400 boys and girls.

Achievement and standards

The academy's results from recent national Key Stage 3 tests in science were broadly in line with its challenging targets for students' performance at the expected Level 5 and exceeded the target for the higher Level 6. Students did not perform as well in English and mathematics and the academy's analysis recognises that these results, although improving, represent underperformance in both subjects. GCSE results were below but close to the academy target: 33 % of students achieved five or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English and 39% achieved five higher grades overall. The academy's data and the observation of lessons and students' work indicates that an increasing proportion of students are on track to achieve challenging targets, although there is considerable variation across and within subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour was at least satisfactory and often good in almost all the lessons observed. Students generally listened well and complied promptly with their teachers' instructions. However, there were a few occasions where this was not the case and as a result a minority of students did not make the progress that they should. Behaviour around the academy was generally good and students are mostly polite and welcoming. Most students collaborated well in paired and group work and relationships with adults and with each other are generally good. This was demonstrated by the generous support that they gave each other during and inter-house football tournament which was held during the lunch break. Attendance is below average at 90.08%, but is improving

because of the good range of actions to support and challenge students who do not attend well. Punctuality to the academy and to lessons is not as good as it should be. Lateness to lessons results in a ragged start to some lessons and limits the progress that students make.

Quality of provision

All lessons observed were at least satisfactory, but the quality of teaching and learning varied widely; it was good in almost half of the lessons seen. Most teachers had good relationships with students, which allowed effective non-confrontational management of behaviour. In many lessons the teachers used skilful questioning to check students' understanding and carefully planned sequences of activities to ensure that students were engaged and challenged. In these lessons the pace was brisk and it was clear that teachers enjoyed the subject and had high expectations of what students could achieve. Good use was made of working with a partner or in a group to discuss and develop ideas and responses to questions.

In the weaker lessons teachers spent too much time on some activities at the expense of others. Some teachers did not check what the student already knew and as a result the tasks were not well matched to the students' needs or prior attainment. The academy has correctly identified that, although there is some good practice, there is a need for teachers to develop further the use of assessment information to match teaching to the range of needs and abilities within a class. Teaching assistants often worked well with students on a one-to-one basis, but they were less effective in the parts of the lesson where the teacher was working with the whole class.

The academy has a very well planned curriculum from Years 7 to 11, with good opportunities for all students in Years 10 and 11 to follow at least one vocational course in an applied GCSE or a BTEC qualification. The breadth of vocational subjects has increased and caters well for the needs of all students. Students of all abilities are able to develop their vocational and work skills through a flexible school-based curriculum and attendance at the local college and other venues, in a variety of subjects such as baking and confectionery, business, retail and travel and tourism. Students of lower ability successfully achieve qualifications at entry level and level 1.

The academy specialisms are having a positive impact on raising attainment. The influence of the sports specialism is most pronounced as this was already established as a specialism in the predecessor school. Sports specialists are driving the initiative of 'project based learning'. Teachers are encouraged to develop their skill and ability to adopt and use some of the learning and teaching techniques based upon a 'coaching style'. This method is intended to raise student engagement and their self confidence so that they can become independent and take more responsibility for their own learning.

The academy sixth form currently offers a curriculum based on the aspirations of the 36 students recruited from Year 11. There is a small selection of Level 3 and Level 2 courses including GCE AS courses in humanities subjects and vocational subjects at BTEC First and National levels in health and social care and BTEC First in media, sports and fitness. The academy has made a satisfactory start in developing

pathways that enable students to combine vocational and academic study. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are satisfactory. Students engage well with their teachers and most are strongly motivated and clearly enjoy their lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge. There is however insufficient emphasis in lessons on pair and group work and the development of students' independent learning and critical thinking skills. Monitoring of students' progress in relation to academic targets is mostly satisfactory but insufficiently rigorous for those students who underachieve, as records indicate that a minority of students are at least two grades below target.

Academic monitoring in Years 7 to 11 rigorously identifies underachieving groups and ensures students are well supported through learning support assistants. The academy has established an Achievement Commitment and Excellence programme and through the Black Pupils Achievement Project has been successful in raising standards in Year 11 for Black Caribbean students. Managers are now targeting other minority groups such as Black African and White British where underachievement has been identified. Guidance for students on their subject choices and flexible learning programmes in Year 9, and 11 is good and enables students and their parents to be well informed. Students receive good pastoral care. In September this year the academy introduced a vertical coaching system of tutoring with mixed age range groups. Registration periods create a good start to the school day with a sound learning focus, through well structured group and individual activities, for instance, on anti-bullying or designing a house flag. The academy is successfully establishing a caring and cohesive ethos with older pupils proactively helping younger pupils during these sessions and at other points during the day, through well organised peer mediation and mentoring activities.

Induction for Year 7 students is good and includes teambuilding and 'buddying' with older students. Precise information from primary schools on students who have additional needs is used effectively to ensure that they are well supported when they join the academy.

The Panel for Student Support group (PASS) provides multi-agency support for vulnerable students and those students considered at risk. Exclusions are now reducing and the academy attributes success in this area to the House system, the work of student support managers, the use of the supervision room, more opportunities for students to engage with the broader life of the school and the work of the inclusion unit. Students who are placed in the internal Inclusion Unit are given good support to enable them to successfully complete AQA Unit Awards and to be reintegrated into lessons.

Leadership and management

The principal provides very strong, clear leadership and along with the leadership team has a clear picture of the academy's strengths and areas for development and the actions required for future improvement. The rapid transition from the predecessor school to academy status and growing stature of the academy in the local community demonstrate a clear ability to manage change. The academy's priorities for improvement are sharply

focussed on raising attainment and are appropriate for the stage of development that the academy has reached.

The senior leadership team is developing stronger systems of line management of middle leaders by senior leaders with a robust framework focussing on monitoring standards and achievement. The academy is committed to providing a comprehensive professional development programme for all middle leaders to develop their capacity and enhance their skills to become effective leaders capable of raising standards. An example of this is a lesson observation training programme that has ensured accurate benchmarked judgements in relation to teaching and learning. This has made leaders more confident in making their judgements and in identifying improvement in the areas for which they are responsible. A new management information system is in place but is still at a relatively early stage of implementation and some aspects are being developed and refined. Governors fulfil well their role of being a critical friend, and are regular visitors to the academy.

External support

The academy has retained useful links with a number of organisations within the local community and is developing new ones, particularly with other academies in the federation. The academy has used a range of advisers and consultants, including some from the local authority, to help improve capacity, particularly in relation to teaching and learning and middle leadership and management.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on improvements to the quality of learning and teaching across the whole academy so that more is consistently good or better.
- Improve the use of assessment data to ensure that it is used well to inform lesson planning so that the needs of different groups of students are met.
- Further improve students' attitudes to learning and their punctuality and attendance.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of Governors and the Academies Group at the DCSF.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
HM Inspector of Schools