

Harris Academy Merton

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 131897 |
| Local Authority | Merton |
| Inspection number | 330761 |
| Inspection dates | 15–16 October 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Jacqueline White HMI |

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

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Type of school | Academy |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 785 |
| Sixth form | 55 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Dr Paul Clifford |
| Principal | Mr Andy Halpin |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Academy address | Wide Way Mitcham CR4 1BP |
| Telephone number | 020 8623 1000 |
| Fax number | 020 8623 7655 |

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Age group | 11–19 |
| Inspection dates | 15–16 October 2008 |
| Inspection number | 330761 |

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the academy. Under the Education Act 2005, the academy must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Harris Academy Merton opened in September 2006. It is part of a federation with seven other Harris academies in south-east London and it specialises in business enterprise and sport. The academy is smaller than most secondary schools with significantly more boys than girls. Sixth-form provision is offered through a federation of three of the Harris academies. As one of the three, the Harris Academy Merton is establishing itself within these arrangements with a sixth form that is expanding rapidly.

Students come from diverse backgrounds but the majority are of White British and Black African or Caribbean heritage. Over a quarter of students speak English as an additional language; very few are at the early stages of learning English. An above average number of students have a learning difficulty and/or disability, including 3.1% who have a statement of special educational need. The academy serves a community that experiences significant socio-economic deprivation. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is well above average. A high number of pupils join and leave the school at other than usual times.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 1

Harris Academy Merton is improving rapidly and its overall effectiveness is outstanding. A sixth-form student summed up the ethos of the academy in his absolute conviction that 'we are building our futures here together'. There are strong signs of improvement in many areas of the academy, not least in rising standards, the quality of teaching and in the effectiveness of leaders to drive forward change.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Under the excellent direction of the principal, a highly effective senior leadership team has been quickly established. The team is deeply ambitious for the academy, has high expectations and is successfully redressing a legacy of underachievement. Middle leaders support the drive for improvement and are growing in expertise. They are empowered and encouraged to monitor and account for standards.

The tracking of students' progress has strengthened, particularly in Key Stage 4 where effective, timely support helps students at risk of underachievement stay focused on their work and their challenging targets for achievement. Standards overall are broadly average and most students now make good progress in relation to their starting points.

Teaching and learning are good. There is a clear focus throughout the academy on developing effective practice. However, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Assessment information is not always used well to set tasks that provide a suitable level of challenge for students in lessons, particularly higher attaining students. There are too few opportunities for students to lead learning in lessons and work both independently and collaboratively.

The good curriculum in Years 7–11 offers students choices that capture their interest and enable them to experience success. The outstanding range of provision in the sixth-form federation is helping to develop students as lifelong learners with a commitment to higher education. Students also enjoy and benefit from the rich range of extra-curricular opportunities available. The academy's specialisms are helping to drive up standards. They add breadth to the curriculum and develop students' social skills, confidence and motivation.

There are extensive opportunities for students to make a positive contribution to the community; the keen interest taken by many is evidence of their good personal development that improves still further in the sixth form. Most students are developing into thoughtful citizens who care about the wider community and the environment.

Students are encouraged to express opinions about their academy and be aware of the contribution they make to its improvement. The academy successfully develops individuality and a strong sense of belonging. Care, guidance and support are good overall and excellent in the sixth form. Supportive relationships are an important factor in students' good behaviour and positive attitudes.

Self-evaluation identifies strengths and areas for development that are addressed through robust improvement planning. Excellent capacity for improvement is demonstrated in the distance the academy has travelled in raising standards and creating a supportive, cohesive community strongly focused on students' emotional well-being and academic success.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of the academy's sixth form is excellent. The most recent results show that students made good progress to reach above-average standards. The sixth form is popular with students and growing rapidly. The overall quality of teaching is good. At its best, well-pitched, enthusiastic teaching engages students and the detailed assessment of their work highlights points for improvement. Sometimes lessons lack challenge because teachers new to sixth-form teaching are not grasping opportunities to develop higher order thinking and communication skills. Students speak with feeling about the significance of the positive relationships they have with staff. They greatly appreciate the time given to helping them resolve problems, improve their work and organise their studies.

Value for money is good. Excellent leadership co-ordinates provision and support for Merton students and expands their horizons through the opportunities provided by the federation. The curriculum, an outstanding feature of the sixth form, offers an impressive range of courses at different levels, including applied courses linked to the academy's specialisms.

Students benefit from an excellent programme of enrichment activities. They enjoy taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the federation and say they feel at home in all three academies because the 'Harris feeling' pervades. They rise to the challenge of leading initiatives within the academy and are very good role models for younger learners. Students' rapidly growing confidence and rising aspirations are testament to their outstanding personal development and well-being.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Ensure all students are sufficiently challenged in lessons by using assessment information to match learning objectives and opportunities closely to their needs.
- Develop students' learning skills by extending their opportunities to lead learning in lessons and work independently and collaboratively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the academy with standards that are below average. In particular, the literacy and numeracy skills of students are underdeveloped. In 2007, the standards achieved at the end of Year 9 were low overall. Students' progress from Key Stage 2 to 4 was satisfactory and standards at the end of Year 11 were below average.

The current picture is very different. Analysis of provisional 2008 results indicates some improvement in national test results at the end of Year 9. At the end of Year 11, results show a very significant increase in the proportion of students gaining five higher-grade GCSEs, and in the proportion including English and mathematics amongst the five. Standards are rising rapidly in Key Stage 4 and students' achievement overall is now good including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language. The excellent systems for tracking students' progress in Years 10 and 11 are closing the gap between the achievement of some groups of students and subjects. The academy is strengthening the tracking of progress in foundation subjects in Key Stage 3. Current assessment information suggests the academy is on the way to achieving its challenging targets to raise standards further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

It is no surprise to find students enjoy academy life with its many opportunities to learn and develop as young people. The development of a calm, caring ethos underpinned by a respect for personal qualities and differences has led to good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students feel very safe and benefit from a supportive learning environment that enables them to focus on achievement. The academy provides high quality opportunities for students to maintain healthy lifestyles through regular physical exercise and sporting opportunities. High expectations for students' personal development are founded on the belief that all students can succeed. This gives students confidence and develops positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the academy. Students understand the clear code of conduct and are polite and courteous. There are excellent opportunities for students to make a positive contribution within the academy and the local community. For example, students have been instrumental in setting up the successful 'Kickz' community football club.

The academy acknowledges there is further work to do in raising standards in English and mathematics so that students' future economic well-being is secured. However, there are many good opportunities for students to develop workplace skills through enterprise initiatives and work experience. The academy has worked rigorously to put good systems in place to improve attendance, which is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. As a result, students enjoy their lessons and make good progress. Robust monitoring of teaching and learning and excellent professional development for staff are strengthening practice. In the most successful lessons, learning objectives are matched carefully to students' needs and interesting activities provide opportunities to develop learning skills and understanding. Students are expected to think for themselves and demonstrate understanding by applying what they have learnt. Positive relationships and effective classroom management ensure good behaviour and learning. Teaching assistants skilfully support and promote students' progress.

Where teaching is less successful, tasks are not sufficiently personalised for learners. Here, teachers miss opportunities to stretch students and accelerate progress because they spend too much time talking and lack the confidence to allow students to take responsibility for learning. Plenary sessions are sometimes not used well to fix key learning points and evaluate students' understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with an appropriate focus on literacy and numeracy skills in Key Stage 3. It reflects the academy's specialisms in sports and business enterprise and is responsive to the needs of students. All Year 10 students follow BTEC courses in media or sport and all students in Key Stage 3 have a weekly lesson of enterprise. These aspects of the curriculum

are enjoyed by students and make an important contribution to their well-being and understanding of the world.

The curriculum is inclusive and ensures that all groups of students, including those with learning difficulties, and English as an additional language are able to participate fully and develop as well-rounded individuals. There is a strong work-related dimension in Years 10 and 11. The academy is responding to students' interest in vocational education by introducing additional new courses.

An extensive programme of enrichment opportunities helps to widen students' experiences and includes a good number of sports and music clubs. There are appropriate plans to provide opportunities for students to develop their global awareness through international links.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students feel secure in their academy because pastoral care is good and staff know them very well. Requirements for safeguarding students and ensuring their welfare are fully met. The academy is developing good links with parents and carers who value the wide-ranging support offered; they are well informed about their children's progress and appreciate opportunities to develop skills alongside students such as learning about internet safety.

Very good links with external services mean that multi-agency working is effective. Support is efficiently co-ordinated to resolve problems that may become barriers to students' learning. Students receive guidance through regular meetings with tutors where they review their targets for improvement. However, marking does not always support these processes; there are inconsistencies in its quality and good practice has not yet been sufficiently shared.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the academy are outstanding. The principal's clear vision for the academy puts the well-being and achievement of students at the heart of everything. He is well supported by a dedicated senior leadership team and by middle managers who are quickly developing expertise.

The academy has come a long way in a short period of time. Rising standards are a consequence of high expectations, challenging targets, and a determined focus on developing effective leadership at all levels including teachers' leadership of learning. Accurate, searching self-evaluation and robust monitoring are the engine driving the continuous improvement of outcomes for students.

Good governance provides an effective balance of challenge and support. Governors have a clear view of the priorities for improvement, are involved in monitoring progress and are increasingly influential in setting the strategic direction of the academy.

The academy is outward looking and works well in partnership with other agencies to enhance students' experiences, develop responsible citizenship and promote harmony within the context of the wider community. The academy is building a good reputation in the local community and has gained the high regard of parents.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

| | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall | 16-19 |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|--|----|----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 | 1 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | NA | NA |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 2 | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 | 1 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress | 2 | |

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 | |
| The attendance of learners | 3 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 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 learners' needs? | 2 | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 | 1 |

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 | 2 | |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 2 | |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 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 | |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

29 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Harris Academy Merton, Mitcham, CR4 1BP

We really enjoyed meeting you. Thank you for talking to us so honestly about the academy and the progress you are making. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection. Your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it.

The overall effectiveness of the academy, including the sixth form, is excellent. Leaders and managers are doing an outstanding job in bringing about rapid improvements. You achieve well, examination and test results are improving and standards are rising. We were impressed by your good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Most of you enjoy academy life and appreciate the wide range of extra activities available to you. You have a good choice of subjects to study in Key Stage 4 and the curriculum in the sixth form is outstanding.

You told us you feel safe and very well looked after. You greatly value the positive relationships you have with each other and with staff. You are developing into thoughtful citizens who care about the wider community and the environment. Many of you welcome responsibility and take up the excellent opportunities to make a positive contribution to the academy and the wider community.

Together with you, the principal, governors and staff, have brought the academy a long way since it opened two years ago. Everyone is determined to keep on improving and we have said the following things must be at the top of the list.

- Make sure all of you are stretched in lessons by matching learning objectives and opportunities closely to your needs.
- Develop your learning skills by giving you more opportunities to lead learning in lessons and work independently and collaboratively.

With very best wishes for the future,

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline WhiteHer Majesty's Inspector