

Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132711
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	330762
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Robin Hammerton HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	784
Sixth form	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Mary Atkinson
Principal	Ms Jane Fletcher
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	Homestall Road London SE22 0NR
Telephone number	020 7732 2276
Fax number	020 7277 7785

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a small girls' academy, which opened in September 2006. It has a sports specialism, leading a local sports partnership. It is part of the federation of Harris Academies and has a small but growing sixth form intended to be shared with the partner boys' academy, which is due to open in 2009. The academy has added for itself further specialisms in health sciences and enterprise. It serves an ethnically diverse area of significant deprivation within the London Borough of Southwark. Students enter from many primary schools; their attainment on entry, whilst mixed, is consistently well below average. A few students are looked after. More than half of students speak English as an additional language, though very few are at an early stage. An above average proportion of students are identified as having learning difficulties and/ or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 3

This academy provides a satisfactory education. There are clear signs of ongoing and accelerating improvement and a number of aspects of the academy's work are good.

The experienced new principal has hit the ground running. She has made it her business to assess quickly where the academy works well and where it needs to improve most and, from this very accurate analysis, has already put some key improvements in train. In particular, behaviour in lessons and around the site, attendance and punctuality have improved and are satisfactory. She is also clear about the fact that teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but inconsistent in quality. Opportunities for students to contribute to the school and local community are excellent and students are proud to do so. The academy is itself a strong, racially harmonious, community. Students' personal development and wellbeing are good. The academy is effectively seeking to build on the long tradition of girls' education on the site. Role models of successful women in business, sport and other walks of life are well used to inspire the students. The sports specialism continued from the predecessor school is also well used to promote a number of successful initiatives across the academy.

The principal, staff and governors are very clear about their shared aspiration to raise standards quickly and develop enterprise and workplace skills. With this in mind, the academy understandably places significant emphasis on Key Stage 4. In 2008, there was a significant rise in standards at GCSE from a low base in the academy's first year. The attainment of Year 11 students was within reach of the national average. Key causes of this improvement were careful and close targeting of each student; good academic guidance, mentoring and support so that the students knew what was possible for them and how they could achieve this; and a very effective range of intervention and revision activities as well as booster and catch-up sessions out of school hours. These students' achievement was better than the satisfactory and inconsistent profile of teaching and learning might have suggested was likely. The Key Stage 4 curriculum meets most students' needs, providing an improving range of courses.

At Key Stage 3, standards are low. There was no overall improvement in 2008. Whilst satisfactory, the curriculum in this key stage is not so specifically well matched to students' needs and is not contributing as well as it might to raising standards or developing skills. Rightly, it is under review.

Leadership and management are good. Middle and senior leaders are committed and responsive to the principal's leadership. Most welcome the sense of direction she provides and the accountability she expects. The academy is well placed to continue to improve.

Only a very small proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires to the inspection team, so it is hard to be clear from this about their views. However, the questionnaires received broadly supported other inspection evidence.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form opened in September 2007 and has doubled in size, though it remains small. This year, it admitted seven boys. Students appreciate the friendly, supportive environment and particularly the individual guidance they receive in the small classes. Teaching is satisfactory and students make satisfactory progress, although standards in the small number of courses are very low. Arrangements for monitoring students' academic progress are developing; however,

they are carried out in a relatively informal way with few opportunities for more stringent academic counselling.

The curriculum is very limited and does not adequately meet the needs or interests of all the current and prospective students. There is a productive link with Millwall Football Club and some co-operation with Southwark College but, overall, collaboration with other providers or the local 14-19 partnership is weak and not well used to enhance the curriculum offer for students. The curriculum is, however, supplemented by a limited number of opportunities to develop extended skills such as the activities in enterprise and induction week.

Sixth formers can take advantage of the extended and extra-curricular activities available to students in other year groups and, for most but not all, there is optional timetabled provision for enrichment. Many students use these opportunities. They have a strong sense of their place within the academy, feel strongly that their voice is listened to and acted on and are effective ambassadors for the academy. Their personal development and well-being are satisfactory.

The academy now has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the sixth form. Changes are being considered to improve both provision and outcomes for students as it moves towards joint operation with the boys' academy, although it is much too soon to assess the quality and any impact of these.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Raise the quality and consistency of teaching and learning within lessons across the academy, so that specific learning interventions can be more sharply focused on those needing them most; and out-of-hours and additional provision can become less vital to raising standards.
- Refine the curriculum at Key Stage 3 so that it better supports higher attainment.
- Improve the sixth form curriculum offer significantly and the links made with other local post-16 providers and partnerships.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students join the academy with well below average attainment and reach standards that remain well below the national average at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science. This represents just satisfactory progress, although the academy did not meet its targets in mathematics.

In 2008, there were notable improvements in Year 11 examination results and most were very close to, or exceeded, the academy's challenging targets. In particular, the percentage of students achieving five or more good GCSE grades including English and mathematics was not far behind the national average, though further behind the national girls' average which was higher. This represented good progress for this cohort of students during Key Stage 4, particularly in English and mathematics. There was some variation between the achievement of different ethnic groups with students of Black African heritage making particularly strong progress. However, within the group of students from White British or Caribbean heritage, there was some underachievement linked to persistent absenteeism. The academy's analysis of current progress at Key Stage 4 suggests that it is on target to sustain the improvement and reduce underachievement.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equal progress to their peers, and students in care make good progress against their targets due to individual care, support and guidance.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are proud of the academy. They can point out many aspects that have improved and are particularly pleased to see improvements in behaviour. The exclusions level is much reduced but above the rate for girls nationally. The vast majority of students are friendly. They respect and value one another. However, at times, some fall short of the academy's expectations by, for example, inappropriate chatter or calling out in class, which becomes more widespread in lessons that are less interesting or well-managed. Many students grasp opportunities to take leadership roles, influencing the life of the academy and the wider community in many ways. For example, students act as representatives on the influential student and house councils, peer mediators or as members of the 'Don't Mess' team. They feel strongly their voice is heard. During the inspection, trained ambassadors from Year 10 supported a large-scale sports talent programme for local primary schools within the sports partnership. Students show a good commitment to keeping healthy, particularly through all students' regular participation in sport and physical activities. The extent to which they follow healthy guidelines in choosing food is more mixed. Students are knowledgeable about how to keep safe and are proactive in reporting any instances of unfairness or injustice. Attendance has improved notably from a very low base to near the national average, although some students' attendance continues to cause concern and reduce their achievement.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons are inconsistent in their quality across the academy, a point which the students themselves, as well as senior leaders, know well. There is some good and outstanding teaching as well as a small proportion of inadequate lessons. There are constructive relationships and the students come to class ready to learn. Lessons are often planned with a variety of features to engage students actively. In particular, students are keen to explain and share ideas with each other. In some lessons, adept and incisive questioning challenges students' thinking well. However, at other times, the pace of learning is too slow and students lose interest. In too many lessons, resources, tasks and learning objectives are not sufficiently well matched to the needs of all students and not all students make the progress that they might. Teachers consider information about students' attainment in their planning. However, the effectiveness of the use of these data and assessment strategies within lessons, to identify the next steps in students' learning and help them to make faster progress, is not consistent.

Marking is also inconsistent. Many books contain helpful comments about how to improve work, though this varies across and within subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets most students' needs adequately, providing a suitable range of subjects and courses. There is a sound range of visits out and residential activities. All students have access to a wide variety of high quality sports provision in and out of lesson time, much of it in the well-equipped sports centre. This befits the specialist status. The improving range of vocational options at Key Stage 4 suits the students' needs and supports the enterprise specialism. At Key Stage 3, the academy is aware of the need to continue to enhance the curriculum so that it better develops students' learning skills and promotes higher attainment. Students at an early stage of learning English are effectively supported in gaining access to the curriculum.

The sports specialism is contributing increasingly strikingly to the whole curriculum and encouraging active learning and enterprise. For example, some badminton lessons are used inventively to help students to make independent operational and business decisions about planning a training programme. The induction systems for those starting the school and for all students at the start of each academic year effectively encourage active learning and are influenced significantly by the sports partnership. The 'Opening Minds' group for Year 7 students who need extra support in making the transition to secondary school is very effective in developing their personal and learning skills. A wide and popular range of extra curricular activities, and extended school provision, cover many areas as well as sport, including 'fun with food', homework and booster clubs and the after school 'chill zone'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students are well cared for. Staff go out of their way to provide extra support, particularly when students are encountering difficult or challenging times. There are good links with other agencies and the regular Panel of Additional Support Services meetings ensure a coordinated approach for those students in particularly vulnerable circumstances. A range of expertise, from both within and beyond the academy provides tailored support programmes for individual students. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for. Their needs are assessed soon after they enter the academy and their progress is monitored well. There is close attention to students' safety and protection. The students are very clear that there is always someone to go to if they need advice, including the on-site police officer. The academy is meticulous in following up lateness. The morning 'late room' helps students to understand better the importance of being on time and demonstrates the clear stand that the academy is taking. The academic progress of all students is tracked well. Students are clear about their targets, particularly in Key Stage 4. They consider that advice they receive about course options is well related to the workplace and possible career choices. However, they report some lack of impartial guidance about the range of options available from different post-16 providers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In a short time, working productively with her senior colleagues, the principal has assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the academy in detail and with great accuracy. Having personally observed many lessons, she knows much about the variable quality of teaching. She uses this

information swiftly to bring improvement. For example, teaching staff are now offered bespoke training to support them in improving their practice following observations, although this is naturally at an early stage. The views of students are taken seriously, partly through an established, effective self-evaluation programme called 'monitoring the student experience'. The principal's personal lead in improving attendance, punctuality and consistency in the way the behaviour policy is upheld, all areas of some recent concern, has brought notable improvement in a short time. Good revisions and additions have recently been made to the academy's improvement plan. It is an effective working document, frequently amended and checked by staff. It is sharply focused on the key areas needing improvement in the short and medium terms and has helped improve processes. Whilst rightly celebrating the rise in standards at GCSE in 2008, the academy's self-evaluation makes clear that further improvements are needed to embed that success and spread it to other key stages.

By building rapidly on what has gone before, being explicit about what is needed, and insisting that all staff have greater accountability for students' outcomes, the principal gives the academy a clear sense of purpose. She has bolstered the confidence of staff and students, and provides assurance about the future. Many staff in senior and middle leadership roles have responded well and are providing good support and leadership in their areas of responsibility. The principal, whilst not changing radically the leadership structure she inherited, is judiciously considering options and has made some effective early adaptations; for example, by enhancing the role of the head of sport specialism, which is already making a positive difference. Performance management systems for teaching staff are well established and have contributed effectively to the recent rises in standards.

Leadership and management in the sixth form are satisfactory, though rather dependent on the vision and oversight of the principal. She has a clear view of what the sixth form could become and the importance of focusing on workplace skills. There is, however, too little practical emphasis on how the sixth form might build partnerships with other local providers.

The governing body is well organised and led by its chair. It has a clear vision for the academy, shared with the principal, and is well linked to the federation trust. It challenges the academy effectively to improve and can point to the positive impact of its work on students. It does not, however, have a direct involvement with the monitoring and evaluation of the academy's improvement plan.

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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
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
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	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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	2
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	3	
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**

26 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich, London, SE22 0NR

You will remember that recently I inspected the academy with two more of Her Majesty's Inspectors. This letter is to tell you about what we found.

The first thing to say is that we really enjoyed meeting so many of you. Thank you for your friendly welcome and your very honest and constructive answers to the questions we asked.

We found that the academy provides you with a satisfactory education. Many things are improving and some are already good. For example, you told us, and we could see, that behaviour is better. There was a very good rise in the numbers of students getting good GCSEs last year. You told us about how you value meeting successful women in business, sport and other walks of life and that the academy helps you think about what qualifications you need to get certain jobs. You also said you are pleased that you can take responsibility and that the staff listen to your opinions.

There is also work to do to make the academy better still. For example, some of your lessons are interesting and practical, helping you to learn well, while others are not as good. Again, you told us that and we saw it. The academy needs to work towards making more lessons good. In Key Stage 3, standards need to rise and the curriculum improved for the younger students. In the sixth form, more courses are needed to meet your needs, some of which perhaps could be provided outside the academy. The points in this paragraph are our main recommendations.

Mrs Fletcher knows the academy very well already and is making a big difference. You can help her and the staff by being on time to the academy and lessons and being there every day. I know you sometimes receive rewards for this, which is good, but most importantly, good attendance and punctuality help you make progress now and are good habits for your future lives and workplaces. The academy is keen to hear your views, so do have your say whilst considering carefully the points you make. And, of course, work hard towards achieving your targets.

Good luck for the future!

Robin Hammerton

Her Majesty's Inspector