

Walthamstow Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132727
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	331405
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	793
Sixth form	68
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr James Golob
Principal	Mrs Fiona Cordeaux
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	Billet Road Walthamstow London E17 5DP
Telephone number	020 8527 3750
Fax number	020 8527 3603

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Inspection number	331405

© Crown copyright 2009

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 (HMI).

Description of the school

Walthamstow Academy, sponsored by the United Learning Trust, opened in September 2006 with the sixth form following a year later. It is smaller than the average secondary school. Its specialisms are in mathematics, science and business and enterprise. It serves an area that includes some deprivation and more than twice the average number of students are entitled to free school meals. Many different languages and ethnic groups are represented in the academy with the largest single group being White British. Attainment on entry is mixed but well below average overall, particularly in literacy. About half of the students speak English as an additional language with a small but significant number arriving at an early stage of learning English. More students than average are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 2

The academy provides a good education for its students. Through strong leadership and increasingly effective teamwork, it has developed an aspirational culture, driven by success. The academy slogan, 'the best in everyone', rings increasingly true. Examination results have improved notably in a short time. Students' progress and achievement from their starting points are good in most subjects, although standards remain well below the national average. Rightly, the academy aims to raise standards much further. In the sixth form, students' progress is satisfactory rather than good in their new courses. Students' personal development and well-being are good with most enjoying being at school and appreciating the opportunities available. Their voice in the academy is improving through, for example, a well-organised and increasingly influential school council. Students met by inspectors were clear in their views: 'Yes, this is a good place to be.'

Parents are supportive of, and pleased with, the academy. Many perceive the high aspirations and say their children are happy and making progress. However, some would like more information about their child's progress, especially early in Year 7. Others consider that behaviour can be bad. HMI considered this issue carefully and noted that, whilst there is some disorderly behaviour in corridors and around the site, students are well behaved and wanting to learn in most lessons. The rate of exclusions has dropped notably as the ethos of the academy has continued to improve.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are usually well structured and paced. Teachers know their subjects well, transmitting their enthusiasm and knowledge effectively. The curriculum meets most needs and is being thoughtfully refined. For example, newly introduced nurture and 'stretch' activities in Year 7 effectively motivate and support identified students. Students are known and cared for well by many dedicated staff. However, despite some improvement, the specific linguistic needs of students for whom English is an additional language are not addressed well enough in too many lessons across the academy. A member of staff who has been leading this area since September, with very good expertise, is working hard on this but has much still to do to ensure consistently good practice. The academy is developing its approach to tracking students' academic progress, as tracking data does not provide high enough quality information. Whilst students are aiming high, their targets are not always demanding enough and their performance in relation to them not clearly enough understood by staff and students. In consequence, work in lessons is often not closely matched to the needs of individuals and groups of students.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Well thought out decisions were made when the sixth form curriculum was first set up and then expanded this year, based on students' needs, interests and high aspiration. Recruitment of students increased significantly this year as the sixth form built momentum. However, numbers are still low, with very few in Year 13, and this naturally restricts the range of available courses. The range of courses below A-level is limited and work with other local providers to help broaden provision is at an early stage.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and improving. Many teachers were new to post-16 teaching when the sixth form started. Some useful training work is being done to

enable them to adjust effectively. Relationships and teacher subject knowledge are good. However, sixth form lessons do not always provide students with opportunities to learn independently and discuss issues widely. Standards, at this early stage, are very low compared to the national average. There are signs of some improvement this year although progress varies between courses. Overall, the students following the first year of A-level courses, and those who retook GCSEs, made satisfactory progress in 2008.

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff offer good academic and personal guidance, meeting students' individual needs and helping them apply for university and prepare for adult life. As a result, students' personal development and well-being are good. They demonstrate good attitudes to learning. All sixth form students contribute to the academy community, for example by helping in lower school lessons, supervising clubs and being positive role models to younger students.

Leaders have a clear view about what needs to be done to develop the sixth form further based on sound self-evaluation. However, not enough use is made of data about students' targets and achievement in assessing the effectiveness of the sixth form and helping students to make faster progress.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Raise standards further across the whole academy and improve the consistency and rate of progress in the sixth form.
- Improve the reliability of target setting and assessment tracking throughout the academy, so that students' progress is better measured and work in lessons matches their needs.
- Continue the improvement of provision for students for whom English is an additional language, ensuring that their specific language needs are better met in lessons in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In 2008, standards continued to rise following the leap in 2007, with the proportion of students achieving five or more grades A* to C at GCSE increasing significantly. There was a smaller rise in the percentage doing so with English and mathematics included, which remains well below the national average. The school exceeded its targets for the first of these thresholds and was close to it for the second. In 2007, the standards at Key Stage 3 were exceptionally low. The school's evaluation of the 2008 standards at Key Stage 3 shows them to be similar to those in 2007, overall with some improvements in the proportion of students reaching the higher levels in mathematics and science.

Year 11 students in 2008 made good progress between key stages 2 and 4. Progress was very strong in English and mathematics from low bases. Nevertheless, there were some subjects in which students did not do as well. The school has identified these areas accurately and made changes to address them. Its data, and progress seen in lessons, indicate that current students are making good progress. In 2008, some students with LDD made better progress than their peers. Those whose first language is not English made similar progress to others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy school. Attendance has improved significantly and is above national average. Students understand how to live healthy lifestyles and benefit from the registered nurse on

staff. They appreciate the improvements made to the catering provision and the opportunities for sporting and physical activities. They feel safe and well cared for, reporting that bullying incidents are rare and dealt with effectively. Their behaviour is satisfactory. Older students in particular report that behaviour has improved, that few lessons are now disrupted by misbehaviour, and that, where this does occur, it is dealt with more quickly and effectively. The number of exclusions has fallen and the seriousness of the incidents has declined. However, not enough teaching staff visibly supervise outside of lessons and behaviour in corridors and shared areas is, at times, boisterous and noisy. The movement of some students around the site is slow and time is sometimes lost at the beginning of lessons.

The academy does much to prepare students for their future economic well-being, partly through its business and enterprise specialism. Mock interviews, for example, are valuable. However, opportunities for students to develop independent and group working skills, used in the workplace, are missed in some lessons. Students have extensive opportunities to make a positive contribution to the school community. A range of posts of responsibility exists, including school council representatives, form captains, charity representatives, and environmental representatives. These posts are circulated regularly to ensure that all students play a role. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching enables students to learn well and make good progress. Teachers transmit their good subject knowledge with enthusiasm and plan carefully sequences of appropriate activities. Teachers often refer to National Curriculum levels and examination grades in lessons, which help students understand how to improve their work. Members of staff frequently use praise and encouragement well to build students self-esteem and reinforce good behaviour. In response, students often work hard. They also enjoy the way that teachers use information and communication technology (ICT), such as the interactive whiteboards, to illustrate points and motivate them.

In some of the strongest lessons, teachers use key words and oral work, including pair or group discussion effectively to involve all students. This includes those who are at an early stage of learning English or who have lower levels of literacy. They involve teaching assistants well in supporting students including those with LDD. In the less effective lessons, work does not meet the different needs of students well enough through drawing on accurate assessment of each student's attainment. Teachers engage students through targeted questions and answers, although sometimes without involving them all or encouraging higher-level thinking. Marking is inconsistent in its frequency and its support for students in improving their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. It meets the needs of students appropriately. Schemes of work for subjects are suitable and, in some cases, recently helpfully improved. Visits out, including residential visits, make a valuable contribution to students' learning. Students make options for Year 9, which motivates them. It is possible, however, for Year 9 students to drop discrete provision in religious education at this stage, which leaves them only with a small residual provision through personal, social, and health education and assemblies. In Key Stage

4, a suitable range of vocational courses is offered alongside more traditional subjects. The introduction of BTEC courses has helped to raise standards. There is, however, no provision for functional English and mathematics for those students who could benefit, though this is planned from September 2009.

Students are using ICT increasingly across the curriculum, though the academy is well aware that this needs further development. The new virtual learning environment is accessed by most students outside lessons, but homework is set inconsistently. The specialism in business and enterprise is increasingly effective. For example, Year 7 students take part in business challenges and Year 11 students benefit from mock interviews with business leaders for which they are well prepared. The impact of the specialisms in mathematics and science is more limited, though there are some positive developments, particularly in science. There is a range of enjoyable and relevant activities in lunchtime and after the end of the school day.

The curriculum provided for students for whom English is an additional language has improved since it was raised as a concern in the March 2008 Ofsted monitoring visit report. Students starting in the school with little English are now provided with a rapid induction programme, which enables them to access the curriculum more readily. However, in too many lessons, students, whilst well included, do not have their specific needs sharply enough met. For example, despite improvement and greater awareness amongst staff, key vocabulary is not consistently well introduced and used and students do not always have verbal or written linguistic errors checked or corrected.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Comprehensive systems are in place to care for and safeguard students. Staff know students well as individuals and they work hard and effectively to meet their diverse needs. Students much appreciate the individual guidance of many form tutors, which helps them understand, for example, what personal qualities and qualifications may be needed to succeed in particular careers. They are given extensive and impartial advice about their choices at age 16. Students are expected to dress smartly and take pride in themselves. Robust and effective action is taken to improve attendance; absence is monitored closely and persistent non-attenders are targeted and supported directly. Clear, effective systems support a notable reduction in the number of lessons disrupted by misbehaviour. However, some students consider that occasionally they can be punished unfairly without the opportunity to explain themselves.

A range of individual help and support is provided to students to enable them to make good progress. However, tracking systems do not identify precisely enough whether students are on course to meet their targets, which reduces the accuracy of the guidance they receive. The academy has identified the need, and has started work, to improve their systems for target setting and tracking to make them more consistent and coordinated and to ensure the accuracy of teachers' assessment grades.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The principal, well supported by her senior leadership team, provides a strong sense of direction and purpose. Senior staff very effectively promote and communicate a highly aspirational culture, in a supportive but determined style. Staff, including those who are not teachers, feel

involved and enthused. Expectations of the quality that the academy expects are clear with support provided to help staff and students meet these standards. Staff briefings are useful, providing clear and encouraging explanations of what is to be done and why. The senior and middle leadership teams are well structured with clear layers of accountability through line management. They take robust action to deal with underachievement. Teamwork and shared responsibility are developing well. Senior and middle leaders are seen as accessible to staff and students, although some parents feel that their queries could be dealt with more quickly. Staff have good opportunities for professional development and performance management systems are effective. Several are benefiting from being part of a stimulating 'aspirational leaders' programme.

Senior leaders know the academy and most of its strengths and weaknesses intimately. Middle leaders produce very useful written evaluations of their areas of responsibility each half term, which they share and discuss with senior leaders. This effectively ensures that they are held to account but also supported and empowered. Areas for improvement are identified which are included in the academy's effective improvement plan. For example, the new leader for art and design technology is working fruitfully to revise the curriculum so that it is more interesting and motivating. The leader for literacy has written an ambitious and well-structured plan aiming to bring further whole-academy improvement in this key area.

However, whilst generally effective in promoting significant improvement, the academy's self-evaluation evidence is not well collated and organised enough to give clear summary statements in some key areas, especially the outcomes of initiatives. An important instance of this concerns students for whom English is an additional language. The new leader in this area is knowledgeable and effective. However, the academy has not analysed well enough how influential her dedicated work, and that of her small team, has been in changing practices, or how much progress the students have made this year so far. This makes further improvement harder. Although the academy knows well the strengths and weaknesses of provision in its specialist status subjects, it could not provide clear information about its progress towards targets in these areas.

Governance is good. The sponsor challenges and supports well. The academy also has very constructive relationships with the local authority. The knowledgeable and active local governing body asks astute questions of senior leaders. It is not, however, involved in direct 'hands on' formal monitoring and evaluation of the academy improvement plan, but relies significantly on reports from staff.

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?	2	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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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	2
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	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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**

27 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Walthamstow Academy, London, E17 5DP

Thank you very much for the warm and business-like welcome you gave us when we came to inspect the academy recently. We spoke with or met many of you and we enjoyed it. Mrs Cordeaux asked you to be positive and honest with us and you were. Your views and opinions helped us and are mentioned in the full report.

This letter is to let you know what we found in the inspection. We could see that the academy provides you with a good education. It has high aspirations for you and encourages you to share those aspirations. The senior staff lead the academy well. Many of the lessons you have are good and they help most of you to make good progress in most subjects. Examination results at Year 11 have gone up as a result, which is great news. Even so, more improvement still would be good, as you need those exam passes to help you go to college, university or get the right job. We were glad to see that the academy often gives you good advice about what you need to do to reach your goals. It is also good to see you developing some good personal qualities, like teamwork and reflecting on your own work and progress. We were happy to see and hear that behaviour is getting better, especially in lessons, and that you are pleased about that. This is very important, so keep up that improvement, including when you are around the academy building and grounds.

To help make the academy better still, we have made three main recommendations. These are:

- to aim for higher results in all exams and courses and for more consistent performance across sixth form subjects
- to assess your progress more accurately so that you have more helpful targets and work in lessons is better suited to your individual needs
- to help those of who do not speak English as your first language even better, so that you can always understand the lessons and speak and use English more fluently.

Once again, it was very good to meet you and see the exciting work happening in the academy. Well done and keep up the hard work.

Yours faithfully

Robin Hammerton

HMI