

The Harris Academy at Peckham

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134225
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	331640
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	David Scott

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)	1180
Sixth form	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bruce Noble
Principal	Mrs Catharine Loxton
Date of previous school inspection	25 January 2006
Academy address	112 Peckham Road London SE15 5DZ
Telephone number	020 7703 4417
Fax number	020 7703 4305

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In January 2009 an acting executive principal was appointed, on a part-time basis, from a neighbouring Academy within the federation. In May she was confirmed as executive principal.

At the Harris Academy at Peckham the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is much higher than in most schools, as is the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as well as other barriers to learning, mainly involving communication skills. A far higher proportion of students than is typical nationally come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups are from Black Caribbean and Black African heritages. Over three quarters of students, a well above-average proportion, has a home language other than English.

The Academy has dual specialisms in Business and Enterprise and Performing Arts. It has achieved the Artsmark Gold status and holds the Healthy School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 2

The Harris Academy at Peckham provides a good standard of education, and one that is improving rapidly under the positive leadership of the executive principal. The academy has undergone recent significant changes of senior leaders and teaching staff, mainly because of recruitment difficulties. The academy's priority during this period has been to establish a shared vision among all staff in order to raise standards and to bring about much-needed stability. This has raised the confidence of staff, parents and carers. As one parent commented, 'The new leadership team has already made many improvements since the arrival of the new principal.'

Parents consider that the academy enables the students to gain the confidence and skills necessary to prepare them for the world outside, both for training and work. Students enter the academy with attainment levels that are well below average. In the Year 9 national tests standards remain below average. Students' progress through Years 7 to 9 is limited by undeveloped verbal communication skills. The school recognises that this is a priority for improvement. Students' progress begins to accelerate in Year 10, so that by the end of Year 11 they reach broadly average standards in external examinations. Overall, students achieve well from very low starting points.

Since the last inspection standards have risen steadily from year to year. Although the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is still below the national average, there has been a 20 percentage point rise since the last inspection. This is because of the improvements in teaching and learning. These are now good as a result of a robust reorganisation of the academy's teaching force. The hard-won success in promoting students' positive attitudes to learning is enabling the academy to focus sharply on teachers' classroom practice, particularly in challenging more-able students. Such initiatives underpin the school's good capacity to improve further. Self-evaluation is both reflective and honest at senior level, but there are inconsistencies in the rigour with which middle leaders manage their areas of responsibility, for example in monitoring the frequency and usefulness of marking. Many are new in post and the academy recognises that further training and coaching is a priority in order to raise standards.

The recently restructured senior team is working hard to raise standards. The appointment of the executive principal has reinvigorated the push for improvement. Through her leadership, drive and determination the vision for the future is shared and supported by the energetic and enthusiastic senior leadership team, some of whom are also new in post. Senior leaders have the full support of staff, parents and a strong governing body. Pastoral staff are now focusing more sharply than before on how well students achieve. The academy is actively building on the continuing success of its performing arts and business and enterprise specialisms to raise students' aspirations of what they can achieve.

Throughout the academy, there is an extensive range of cultural, sporting and performing arts activities that enhance students' lives. Because of the effective personal care and support, students' personal development is good. However, although central systems to check students' progress are sound, the quality of day-to-day marking and feedback is too variable across the curriculum. Students make a very valuable contribution to the community, particularly through their work with neighbouring primary schools in the arts and business and enterprise areas.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

'Our academy has achieved so much from where it has come from', commented a student. This view echoes that of most post-16 students and reflects the academy's efforts to provide a truly inclusive sixth form. Standards have risen each year since the last inspection and are now average. Achievement is good overall and particularly strong in applied and vocational courses. Checks on the progress of the current Years 12 and 13 students show that the majority are on track to meet their challenging targets. Students are particularly successful in the academy's specialist performing arts and business and enterprise areas.

The rich sixth form curriculum offers a broad range of academic and vocational opportunities, including many at Level 2 (GCSE equivalent), that meet the needs of current students well. Retention rates in the sixth form are increasing steadily. Teaching is well planned and most students complete their courses to proceed to further education and training. Under strong and enthusiastic leadership, the care and support of students and their personal development is good. Attendance is satisfactory and similar to many sixth forms and demonstrates how much all students feel they belong within the academy community. Students new to the academy are well inducted and nurtured so that they quickly feel at home. Sixth formers are beginning to take on a range of responsibilities within the academy and provide good support for younger students. They contribute well to the wider community and much appreciate the extensive range of enrichment activities on offer. Students consider that they get constructive, useful feedback on their major written tasks. However, the quality of the day-to-day marking of their work varies considerably between subjects and not all students are clear as to how close they are to reaching their targets.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Ensure that the quality of marking and target-setting makes clear to students how they can improve.
- Raise standards by improving the quality of teaching and learning to that of the best, particularly in the level of challenge for more-able students.
- Extend the capacity of middle leaders to manage their areas of responsibility through further training.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although standards are broadly average overall, all groups of students, including those with behavioral, emotional and social learning difficulties, achieve well. The majority of students join the academy with well below-average skills, particularly in verbal communications, with many students having limited knowledge of English. Overall, standards at the end of Year 9 remain below average, but students make good progress. Nevertheless, those students with weak communication skills on entry have not always made sufficient progress in Years 7 to 9 because, until recently, the academy has not coordinated well enough its efforts to promote their learning. Provisional test results in 2008 for Year 9 show students' overall rate of progress in English and mathematics is beginning to accelerate.

There is a clear trend of improvement in the students' performance by the end of Year 11. The proportion of the students - half of them - gaining five or more A* to C grades in 2008 was the academy's best results to date. Almost a third of students gained five higher grades that

included English and mathematics. Students performed very well in the academy's specialist arts and business areas. Nevertheless, the progress of this cohort was still dogged by a legacy of underachievement caused by fluctuations in staffing. More-able students in particular achieved less well than they should have. The academy came close to matching its 2008 targets for both Years 9 and 11. Well over a half of the present Year 11 students are on track to meet the academy's challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students value education and want to succeed. Attitudes to learning are good and behaviour is satisfactory. The introduction of the new behaviour policy, together with the highly effective inclusion bases, has resulted in a noticeable reduction in exclusions. Relationships between the students and adults and between students themselves are good. They recognise the increasing importance of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects in their lives. Students enjoy their education and as a result attendance has improved over the past year and is now close to the national average. As one parent commented, 'My child enjoys school and has not missed one day since the term began.'

Students know the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and the need to work safely. This is reflected in the academy gaining Healthy School status. Students engage enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activities and competitive sports, both in class and before and after school, such as boxing, dance and girls' rugby. The school council is effective in promoting students' rights and responsibilities. Students were involved in appointing the principal and this deepened their understanding of the leadership skills required for the workplace. Students regularly fund-raise for charities such as Red Nose Day, and take part in many community activities. For example, over 100 students took part in the recent highly successful production of High School Musical. Roles such as sports leaders and tutors in primary schools develop students' social skills successfully. Learners are well prepared for economic success because of the progress they make with basic skills and exciting work experience placements through links with international companies.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students' positive attitudes to their work make a major contribution to the quality of teaching and learning, which is good. Warm working relationships are reflected in the students' confidence in their teachers. This helps them engage purposefully in learning, as does teachers' enthusiasm for and strong knowledge of their subjects. Additional adults are used well to support students who find it difficult to settle to their work.

Teachers have high expectations and set tasks to reflect students' interests and enthusiasms. For example, in an outstanding business studies lesson genuine excitement was generated during the well-considered, work-related activity exploring the qualities needed for success in business. This brought the topic to life and enabled students to achieve at the highest level. Information and communication technology resources are used regularly by staff to help make explanations clear. Nevertheless, opportunities for students to use these resources in their learning are limited, and consequently this inhibits the development of their independent research skills.

Despite these strong features, the quality of lesson-planning is too variable as activities do not always cater for the full range of learners' needs, particularly for more-able students. In some lessons introductions are over long, which leaves less time for students to work independently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The carefully orchestrated curriculum meets the diverse needs of the students well. In Years 7 to 9 the academy has introduced programmes tailored to students' individual needs. The variety of vocational and academic courses for older students, particularly in the performing arts and business enterprise, ensures that most are motivated to succeed and provides good pathways into the sixth form and employment. Students are encouraged to broaden their horizons through a good programme of extra-curricular activities, which range from boxing to the Korean Language Club. They learn about the world of work through accessing extended work experience opportunities, and good personal development education contributes much to their enjoyment of academy life and positive attitudes to learning. The academy's specialist status in the arts and business encourages participation in the many performing arts activities, both locally and nationally. For example, students recently took part in the Prince's Trust Celebration Day where two students were awarded prizes for dance and art, which is recognition of the school's recent redesignation of an Artsmark Gold Award. Nevertheless, students' literacy and communication skills are not yet well enough developed across all subject areas. Also more-able students would welcome a greater choice of academic subjects at GCSE.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Learners receive good personal support. Staff work hard in supporting students' personal development, and fulfil a valuable role in liaising with families in order to resolve problems. Students know that there is always someone they can turn to if they have a problem. They understand the routines of academy life that create an orderly and safe community. The academy has comprehensive and robust systems for safeguarding and risk assessment and its links with external agencies are good. Students with behavioural, emotional and social learning difficulties are well cared for by a team of teaching assistants who provide swift and timely support as necessary. Effective procedures and interventions to monitor attendance have led to considerable improvement.

Although systems to support students' personal development are well established, the academic guidance that they receive is less secure. The quality of marking is too variable across the academy. In some classes it is very infrequent and does not make clear to the students' how to reach their target grades. As a result, students do not always know how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The determined and reflective principal has a very clear view of the direction for the academy. She has very high expectations and has recently established a new senior leadership team who are eager to drive forward improvements. A number of middle and senior leaders are new in post. Some middle leaders are at an early stage in the development of their management skills.

As a result, some departments are making better progress than others. Processes for monitoring students' performance are beginning to be established centrally but are not yet consistently rigorously implemented at departmental level. Nevertheless, middle leaders are developing their skills and becoming more involved in evaluating the provision and its impact on the students' progress. Staff are very appreciative of the genuine training opportunities afforded to them in the coaching programmes available in the academy. Since the last inspection the academy has recently made rapid progress to improve teaching and learning, to raise students' attainment. However, the full impact is not yet fully evident in all departments.

Governors visit the academy regularly, are extremely knowledgeable, provide good challenge and have been particularly supportive in establishing the new direction for the academy. The academy has successfully evaluated its contribution to community cohesion, which is good. This has been achieved by developing and promoting a clear and detailed understanding of its own community and the different faiths, ethnicities and cultures that exist within it. There is a strong partnership with the federation, local primary schools and external support agencies, which has enabled the academy to help successfully not only its students but also their families, promoting their sense of belonging within the local community.

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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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
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	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	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	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**

05 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Harris Academy at Peckham, London, SE15 5DZ

After our visit to your academy, we would like to share our findings. You made us very welcome and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to talk to us about their thoughts on the academy and their work.

Your academy offers you a good education. We are pleased that your attendance has improved and you behave in an increasingly sensible manner, showing consideration and respect for each other and your teachers.

The commitment shown by your teachers and support staff to keep you safe in the academy is impressive. We know you appreciate this greatly. Many of you use your time at the academy well to make a difference to others through your support and care for younger students and through charity fund-raising projects in the community.

You have a very hardworking and dedicated principal who is very well supported by senior staff and governors. They are working tirelessly on your behalf to make sure you get the best possible education the academy can provide.

To make the Harris Academy at Peckham even better, we have asked your teachers to improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better and to set more challenging tasks for those of you who sometimes find the work too easy. We have also asked subject leaders to monitor the work of their departments more closely and to ensure your work is carefully and regularly marked in order for you to achieve your targets.

We hope you will continue to work with your teachers to make the academy the best it can be.

We wish all of you at the Harris Academy at Peckham a very successful future.

Yours faithfully

David Scott

Lead Inspector