

Harris Academy Bermondsey

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131747
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	334442
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Robert Lovett 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	879
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Holmes
Principal	Dawn Rumley/ Catharine Loxton (Executive)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	55 Southwark Park Road London SE16 3TZ
Telephone number	020 7237 9316
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Harris Academy Bermondsey is an all-girls' academy with specialisms in enterprise and media. It is part of the Harris Federation of South London Schools. It is situated in an ethnically and culturally diverse community in the heart of London. The largest single group of students are of African heritage. A high proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of these students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or moderate learning difficulties. This is the academy's first full inspection since it opened in September 2006. The senior leadership of the academy is undergoing significant change following the appointment of the current principal to the role of executive principal. From September 2009, the academy will operate a small Year 12 and, from 2010, the sixth form provision will be extended to Year 13.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 1

Students say they love their academy and are justifiably proud of its achievements. They believe it is outstanding and inspectors are delighted to confirm the accuracy of this assessment. This is, in large part, a result of the excellent leadership and management of the principal, ably supported by the vice-principals and leadership team, which has resulted in significant and sustained improvement. At the heart of the academy's work is a strong desire to improve the life chances of its students and to raise their aspirations. The academy has a clear focus on raising standards through high-quality care, guidance and support for all students. In consequence, standards, particularly in mathematics, have risen significantly and are now broadly average. The academy is aware of the need for standards to continue to rise if the high expectations it has of itself and its students are to be realised. Because of the outstanding individual guidance and support students receive, they make excellent progress. They thrive in the caring, supportive environment and highly value the mixed-age mentor groups. Mentoring is a significant feature of the academy's work and the personal tutors from local businesses, who mentor students in Years 9, 10 and 11, are highly effective in raising students' aspirations and broadening their horizons.

Teaching is good. Most lessons observed were good or better but too few were outstanding. If the academy's commitment to raising standards is to be realised, a much higher proportion of lessons must be of the highest quality. The academy is proactive in its desire to improve classroom practice. It rigorously monitors the quality of teaching and learning and actively promotes best practice. The academy values the views of students, resulting in high levels of student engagement. Student commissioners are carrying out research into successful learning styles and, as one said, 'we wanted to get our voices heard about learning as well as the premises'. They have been very successful in this ambition. The willingness of teachers to engage with students in projects to improve the quality of learning is testimony to their eagerness to improve their practice further. It also indicates the high levels of commitment of all staff, teaching and non-teaching, who are prepared to go the extra mile. Their dedication to the very wide range of after-hours clubs and activities is just one example of this.

The academy is exceptionally well led and managed. Greatly improved systems for sharing information about students' progress have resulted in middle managers and teachers being much better informed about how well students are doing. In turn, students are now clearer about what they need to do to reach their challenging targets. Changes to the academy's senior leadership have been well managed so that the academy's capacity to improve remains strong.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Raise standards by increasing the proportion of outstanding lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Although attainment on entry to the academy is rising, many students enter Year 7 with standards which are below average and, in some years, attainment on entry is exceptionally low. During their time in the academy, students make outstanding progress and, in 2008, the progress they made in English and mathematics was among the very best nationally. Students make good progress in Key Stage 3 and excellent progress in Key Stage 4. In 2008 the success rate for students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics

(or an equivalent qualification), was high. From the beginning of Year 7 to the time they leave, all groups of students make above-average progress, most, significantly so. However, the attainment of White British students is lower than for most other groups in the school.

Standards have risen steadily since the academy opened and are now close to the national average. Recently, there have been particularly strong gains in mathematics. In 2008, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was below average but it is expected to be close to average in 2009. However, the proportion of students gaining the higher grades in English language, English literature and mathematics remains below average. In communication studies, religious education, and health and social care the proportion of students attaining the higher grades at GCSE was significantly higher than average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students enjoy school and almost all show positive attitudes to learning. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. Students say that they feel extremely safe at the academy. They appreciate being escorted to and from the school premises and are enthusiastic about the new mentoring system which enables them to feel part of a special 'family'. They always know their views will be listened to and respected. The student commissioners provide excellent role models by emphasising the importance of the school motto 'I care'. Students report that bullying is exceptionally rare but, if it happens, it is effectively dealt with. They are extremely clear about the code of conduct which results in good behaviour.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students are very clear about academy's code of conduct and this has resulted in good behaviour overall. They celebrate their multicultural community enthusiastically and share their values and beliefs with pride and confidence. This climate of tolerance and understanding towards others reflects the inclusive and reflective nature of the academy. Students' understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle is excellent. They use this to make sensible diet and lifestyle choices. The impact of the Apple Centre in improving the health and well-being of students is exceptional. Students make an excellent contribution to community decision making through a range of committees, which ensure their voice is heard. Student commissioners and their assistants are committed to improving the quality of learning across the school community. They have engaged with great enthusiasm in research projects with their teachers to improve the quality of learning. The student recruitment group contributes to the recruitment and appointment of new teaching and associate staff. Close links with business partner mentors and local universities ensure that students are well prepared for the world of work and their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Highly effective monitoring of lessons and sharing of good practice have led to significant improvement and is helping to raise students' achievement. Lessons are most successful where teachers have high expectations and where skilled questioning keeps students closely engaged. In an outstanding English lesson, the teacher skilfully encouraged and supported students in their discussions. As a result, students were eager to

answer, confident in using exciting language and prepared to take risks with their answers. A minority of lessons observed lacked sufficient pace. Students were not always given sufficient opportunity to learn independently or to participate as actively as they could have done. Most teachers know their students very well and provide exemplary support. The sharing of learning objectives and success criteria, so that students know what they are expected to learn and how they will be assessed, is well established and consistent across the academy.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The effective curriculum offers students of all abilities good learning opportunities which contribute to their outstanding progress. The new condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum is effective in providing students with appropriate skills to achieve well. The clear pathways in Key Stage 4 provide students with the opportunity to take a range of courses that match their aspirations and interests. A particular strength is the science curriculum, which is finely tuned to meet the varied needs and abilities of all students. Provision for courses in health and social care equip students well for local employment opportunities. The curriculum provides excellent opportunities for students to extend their learning through a rich programme of trips, visits and clubs of all kinds, including academic, sports and media activities. The academy's specialisms of enterprise and media are used well to develop links across subjects, raise standards and develop students' enterprise skills. There is a good programme of extended subjects for more able students which includes 'science for more able scientists'. Out-of-hours courses are extensive and well attended and include such programmes as an engineering club to encourage girls into engineering. In Year 11, students are inspired to aim for higher education through an effective preparatory programme. All Year 9 students visit a British university. This provision has proved to be highly successful, as 95% of Year 11 students progressed on to further study in 2008. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their careers through an effective work experience programme and through highly effective mentoring arrangements with local university undergraduates and employers from the local business community.

The academy has developed a well-planned sixth form curriculum which accurately reflects students' needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

An ethos of care and support permeates all areas of the academy's work. Staff know their students very well and are attentive to their individual needs. Prospective Year 7 students receive very good support to enable them to settle into academy life quickly. There are highly effective initiatives in place which are meeting the many different needs of those students who, for whatever reason, are falling behind. This includes the provision of a nurture group for Year 7 students who are not yet ready to study the full Key Stage 3 curriculum. There is excellent provision for students with behavioural difficulties and specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, they are able to make progress at a similar rate to their peers. The new Apple Centre provides excellent support for students with a range of additional learning needs. This work is supported through the academy's highly effective partnerships with a range of external agencies to promote learners' well-being.

Academic guidance for students is outstanding. All students are a member of a 'family' of mixed year groups. Pastoral leaders and mentors track students' progress exceptionally well, so that additional support can be targeted and more able students identified and challenged.

Undergraduate mentors, and mentors from prestigious city and media organisations, contribute extremely effectively to raising students' aspirations and supporting their academic achievement. Students receive good guidance on how well they are performing and what level they have reached. There are some good examples of teachers' marking and feedback, which means that students understand clearly what they need to do to improve and to reach higher levels of attainment. Measures to improve attendance are proving successful as the rates of attendance have risen in each of the last two years.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The principal and senior leadership team have an exceptionally good understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses, with a very clear focus on raising standards. Middle managers contribute actively to the rigorous review and monitoring of students' standards and progress. Monitoring and self-evaluation are having a very positive impact on attainment across the academy. Existing strengths and identified areas for development inform the targets in the academy development plan very well. Time scales and how the impact of initiatives are to be measured are clear. Targets for individuals and groups of students are ambitious. They result in high expectations and rising standards. Continuing professional development is closely linked to an analysis of academy-wide needs, rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, and other areas of individual need identified by staff. Induction and support for new staff are strong and support for supply teachers is exemplary. They receive daily briefings about the academy's policies and procedures, particularly with regard to the very robust arrangements for safeguarding.

The leadership group is working creatively and enthusiastically to improve the curriculum and meet the needs and interests of all students, so that there is an effective match between the curriculum and their learning needs. There is a very positive learning environment and everyone feels valued and well cared for. The promotion of equality of opportunity to enable all students to achieve their full potential and high aspirations is outstanding.

There are very good links with other Harris Academies, universities, and local enterprise and media partners, which enhance the delivery of academic and vocational courses and raise student expectations. The academy has a good understanding of its community. The contribution students make to the life of the academy is outstanding but their contribution to the wider community is less well developed. The academy is an extremely cohesive community.

Resources have been effectively deployed and value for money is outstanding. Governors and the chief executive of the federation are very well informed about the academy's performance through regular visits, discussions with staff and students, and close monitoring of performance data. Because of its record of rapid improvement, rising standards and excellent leadership, the academy has an outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

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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
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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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

16 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Harris Academy Bermondsey, London, SE16 3TZ

I have to begin by thanking you all for the very warm and friendly welcome you gave my colleagues and me. It is obvious that you are very proud of your academy and all it has achieved in such a brief time. You are right to be proud, because the academy is an outstanding place to be educated. Since it opened, the quality of teaching and learning has steadily improved and this is reflected in rising standards and the excellent progress you make. One of the most significant reasons for this is the high-quality individual care and guidance you receive. The academy's mentoring system, linked to the positive learning ethos, has really helped you to do well. Your behaviour in lessons and around the academy is good, but some of you think it should be even better and there is no reason why behaviour shouldn't be outstanding.

A lot of the credit for the rapid improvement in the academy must go to the principal and vice-principals, who have led and managed the academy's opening and development outstandingly well. Your teachers are doing a good job. They are very committed to helping you to do well and to giving you a wide range of learning opportunities. The exceptionally wide choice of clubs and activities is a good example of this. Students have also played a pivotal role in the development of the academy. Your views and opinions are greatly valued and quickly acted on. The research into effective learning styles that the student commissioners are engaged in looks absolutely fascinating and could have a real impact on lessons. This is a good example of the impact of partnership between the academy and students which is such a prominent feature of the academy's development. Although the academy is outstanding, it is ambitious to improve further and we have suggested they ensure that more lessons are outstanding so that standards rise.

You can help bring this about by ensuring that behaviour is excellent and that you continue to make your voice heard.

Yours faithfully

Robert Lovett

Her Majesty's Inspector