

The Harefield Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135004
Inspection number	320572
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Linda McGill HMI

This inspection of the academy 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	
Academy	584
6th form	85
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Meller
Principal	Mrs Lynn Gadd
Date of previous academy inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	Northwood Way Harefield UB9 6ET
Telephone number	01895 822108
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the academy

The Harefield Academy opened in September 2005. It admitted students who had previously attended the secondary school that the academy replaced. There have been significant delays in completing the new building and the academy still uses the old secondary school's buildings. Some excellent sports facilities have been completed, however.

Situated in the village of Harefield, the academy draws its students from a wide area, including about one fifth from outside of Hillingdon. Student numbers have increased steadily, although the academy is still smaller than most secondary schools. Four fifths of the students are of White British origin and the others come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including a number who are from Traveller families. Few students are in the early stages of learning English. About one third of the students have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities; a substantial proportion of these students have emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. This proportion is larger than the national average. On entry to the academy, attainment is broadly average. Attainment is lower in the upper years of the school, reflecting the legacy of the previous secondary school.

The academy has subject specialisms in sport, and in health and well-being. In September 2007, 36 elite junior athletes were admitted.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 3

The Harefield Academy has achieved a good deal in the two years since it opened. Its overall effectiveness is securely satisfactory and there are many good features to its work. Where the academy is now needs to be viewed in the context of its starting point. On opening, the academy inherited a group of students who, in the main, had made limited progress in secondary school and were disenchanted with learning; this showed in low attendance and unsatisfactory behaviour. Teaching and support staff were unused to a rigorous approach to evaluating their performance and that of the students. Those days are long gone. Although the academy still has some time to wait before it can occupy the new building, there have been significant improvements on many fronts.

The improvements stem from good leadership and a clear vision of what the academy is striving to achieve. The principal and the senior leaders have implemented good systems and procedures that guide the academy's work. Their enthusiasm is shared by team leaders and shows in the work of other staff who are keen to do their best for the students. Teamwork is strong. Governors, too, are passionate about improving the life-chances of students who attend Harefield. The impact of this good leadership shows in a number of ways.

First, the quality of teaching is good and there is a growing proportion that is outstanding. This has changed the students' attitudes to learning for the better. In most lessons, the students are keen to learn and apply themselves well to their work. Second, the students' personal development and well-being are good. There is a growing sense of teamwork among the students as well as the staff, and students make a good contribution to the academy's community. Behaviour is usually good and occasionally it is exemplary. The academy deals sensitively and effectively with the few students who continue to present particular challenges. It has good links with a wide range of agencies and provides good support to students, especially the most vulnerable.

Better teaching and learning mean that students are making better progress in lessons and standards are rising. In 2007, there were good improvements in the test results for fourteen-year-olds, particularly in science. Overall, results in English, mathematics and science were close to the national figures. There were also improvements in GCSE results and the gap between the academy's performance and the national figure closed. However, the proportion who gained five good GCSE passes was below average. The students' achievement is satisfactory. Current assessments show that results are set to rise further at the end of this academic year. The curriculum is satisfactory but does not yet fully meet the needs of all learners. This is one of the academy's priorities for the next academic year.

The admission of elite junior athletes has brought a new dimension to the academy. Flexible timetabling allows them to study and to pursue sporting excellence. Several parents expressed their appreciation of what the academy is doing to support their children in this way. One summed up their views when he said 'the staff have been so supportive, motivating and hard working that the experience has turned out to be very positive'.

The successes that have been achieved so far, together with the commitment and drive to build on them, indicate that there is good capacity for further improvement. The academy is well placed to move into its new building with pride.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Although relatively small, the size of the sixth form has increased considerably in the last two years. Students from other secondary schools are increasingly deciding to join. The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Students make good progress. They appreciate the very positive relationships they have with teachers and the high quality of the teaching and support that they receive. The curriculum is satisfactory. Although increasing, the range of courses is small. The recently introduced sports course is particularly popular. Good partnership arrangements with other schools enable a small number of students to follow courses that the academy is not yet able to offer. However, while they are very happy with the sixth form in general, some students say that they had hoped to study advanced-level courses that ultimately did not run.

Sixth-form students receive good care, guidance and support. The academy works hard to treat each student as an individual and to meet their particular needs; students referred to their student manager as 'a legend'. As a result, their personal development and well-being are good. Sixth formers are confident, articulate and positive about learning. The sixth form is well managed and led, and the capacity for further growth and improvement is good.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Strive to raise standards by accelerating progress still further, especially at Key Stage 4.
- Implement plans to develop the curriculum so that it more closely matches the needs of all learners and enables them to make consistently good progress.

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

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3. National test results improved significantly in 2007 and were broadly average. Progress in science improved significantly: it was exceptionally low in 2006, but in line with what is expected in 2007. GCSE results have increased in the last two years, although they are still below average. The results showed that students made inadequate progress from their starting points at the age of eleven, but much of this was the legacy of their poor achievement prior to the academy's opening. Their progress over their two years at the academy was satisfactory. Current assessments show that standards are rising and progress is continuing to improve in both Key Stages 3 and 4.

The sixth form has a broad entry policy and students enter Year 12 with below average starting points. Standards when they leave the sixth form are close to the national average. Given their starting points and capabilities, sixth-form students make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and their behaviour have improved since the academy opened and older students say that they enjoy school much more now than in the past. They certainly attend school more regularly, and their enjoyment of many of their lessons and sporting activities is clear. Students generally behave well in lessons and move safely around the cramped site. Relationships between students and between students and adults are relaxed and supportive. Students are developing personal qualities that will serve them well in future. For example, they have a strong input to the academy's community through their mentoring and coaching of younger students, and a growing contribution to the local community, such as by coaching pupils in a local primary school. Students respond well to opportunities to show initiative and enterprise, for example in developing sports drinks; cucumber and ginger flavour was not one that inspectors had encountered before! The academy takes account of students' views, for example, in developing the variety of food on offer in the canteen, and is committed to improving further the students' contribution.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students respond well to the academy's ethos of teamwork. They say that bullying is rare and if it does occur, is dealt with effectively by the staff and by trained student mentors. Several praised the work of the student managers saying that their interventions make sure that situations are resolved quickly and to their satisfaction. Students get along together harmoniously.

The academy's specialisms in health and well-being have had a positive impact on the students' lives. Students enjoy the range of healthy food that is available at break and lunch times. Participation in sporting activities is high, reflecting students' commitment to healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The academy has invested a good deal in developing its teaching and support staff. Efforts to eradicate weak teaching and increase the amount of good and better teaching have been successful and have had a positive impact on progress. Students are usually taught well, and make good progress in lessons. Typically, teachers have good relationships with the students. They prepare their lessons well, are clear about what they expect students to learn and check whether they have done so at the end of the lesson. Expectations are suitably high. Teachers often bring students' attention to what they need to do in their work to reach higher standards. Increasingly, teachers are playing their part in promoting the academy's strap line of 'achievement through active learning'. This is most evident in lessons where outstanding teaching enthuses and motivates the students; in such lessons, the students clearly delight in what is happening. More generally, the students are keen to learn and apply themselves willingly to their work. However, some of the older students have not had consistently good experiences of learning in the past and the legacy of this shows in a rather lacklustre response at times. In addition, weaknesses in students' skills of critical thinking and in how they express themselves are hindrances to learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The academy inherited a curriculum from the previous school that did not fully meet the range of students' needs and interests. Improvements are being made. Some early changes are having a positive impact on achievement. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the range of courses is increasing and students have access to a limited range of vocational options. There are well-considered plans to make some further changes to the curriculum for the next academic year. Provision for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory.

The academy's specialisms are reflected strongly in the curriculum. Students are increasingly joining the academy because of the range of opportunities both to study and to participate in sport. Next year, all students will be able to study an accredited course in physical education and sport at Key Stage 4. The academy also offers a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, many of them involving sport and physical activity. These activities are popular with students and make a good contribution to their enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Arrangements for protecting students and keeping them safe are robust. Staff are highly committed to supporting the more vulnerable students and work well in partnership with other agencies to this end. Lessons in personal, social and health education make sure that all students have good advice and support to manage their personal lives. Students readily turn to their student manager or the welfare officer in times of need. The academy strives to keep students in education as much as possible. The work of the inclusion unit and the 'Hamilton' unit for Year 7 students supports students in developing social skills and positive attitudes to schooling. Transition into and out of the academy is managed well; several parents said how pleased they were with the efforts that had gone into making sure Year 7 students were welcomed and helped to settle in. Academic guidance is developing well. Students know the targets they are aiming for in their work and say that staff ensure that they catch up if they fall behind.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The principal gives a strong lead to the academy's work. She is a visible presence around the academy and knows the students well. The principal, senior leaders and governors have a clear vision that combines academic progress with sporting excellence. The legacy of the predecessor school has been tackled with vigour and the vision is much closer to becoming a reality. There have been clear successes in improving the quality of teaching, raising attendance and improving behaviour, which are leading to better progress for the students. The academy's specialism in sport is already having a strong impact and there are further exciting developments on the horizon.

There are clear systems for reviewing the academy's effectiveness and for involving students, staff, parents and governors in the process. The improvement and action plan contain appropriate priorities. The academy's status in the community is growing and it is becoming a school of choice. Staff at all levels are enthusiastic about the academy's potential and are committed to striving for continued improvement. Rightly, there is evident pride in what has been achieved so far.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	Academy 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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the academy 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?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	
How well 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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
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

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the academy's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
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 academy require special measures?	No	
Does this academy require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Harefield Academy, Harefield, UB9 6ET

Thank you for the welcome you gave me and my colleagues when we inspected your academy recently. We appreciated the opportunities we had to meet with some of you and to talk with others in lessons. Your views on life and learning at Harefield formed an important part of the evidence we used in coming to our conclusions.

We judged that The Harefield Academy is providing you with a satisfactory standard of education, and, as I'm sure you know, there is much that is good. A lot of work has gone into improving teaching in order to make sure that you make the progress that you should. This has been successful; we found that teaching is usually good and in some lessons it is outstanding. This is helping you to reach higher standards in your work. Good teaching also means that you enjoy learning much more. Teaching is not the only aspect of the academy's work that is good. There is much for you to be proud of about yourselves and your attitudes to learning. You work well in lessons and behave well; in fact, sometimes your behaviour is excellent. You pull together and support each other; these qualities will serve you well when you leave the academy for work or further study. We were also impressed by the academy's excellent sporting facilities and the way you are taking up healthy lifestyles.

Even though they improved, last year's GCSE results were below average and this is one of the key areas that we found needed further improvement. The curriculum is not yet meeting the needs of all of you as well as it could. This is the second aspect of the academy's work that is a priority for improvement. The academy already has plans to do this at the start of the next academic year.

You can help in this process by keeping your targets at the forefront of your minds and striving to exceed them if you possibly can.

I wish you all good luck with your studies and your sporting ambitions, and hope that the forthcoming move to the new academy building inspires you to do even better.

Yours sincerely,

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector