

8 October 2009



Dear Students

Inspection of Harris City Academy Crystal Palace, Croydon, SE19 2JH

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to thank you all very much for welcoming us to your academy. We enjoyed the opportunities we had to meet some of you in lessons, small groups and around the building. The discussions and responses to the questionnaire helped the inspection team to come to some important judgments about the academy's provision for your education.

Harris City Academy Crystal Palace, fondly referred to as HCACP, is outstanding in all areas of its provision. This is an amazingly good feat, achieved over two years as an academy, building on the success of the Harris CTC. This achievement explains the passion in your comments about the academy's work. It provides you with a first class education, and helps you to exceed all expectations. The quality of leadership and management is exemplary. The principal's dynamic and steely leadership resulted in the academy achieving its best results in 2009. These results were very high for a number of reasons. First, the teachers were determined that all students, regardless of ability, gender, or race would achieve much better grades than those predicted. And yes, students achieved what appeared to have been an impossible task. This was possible because, as you say, the teachers 'will always go the extra mile to give support'. Second, your teachers demonstrate mastery of their subject and use their expertise to plan and inspire you to learn well. At all times, expectations are high. Third, the curriculum is used very well to increase your thinking. In this, the academy exploits your skills and talents. For example, it fast tracks you and provides personalised studies to enable you to take AS-levels in Year 10 and study additional subjects such as Latin and Chinese independently. Fourth, your outstanding personal development, the high quality support, recreational activities and opportunities for you to critique your teachers' work ensure that they know what helps you to learn well. This partnership work with staff is outstanding and the student commission is used very well across the federation to air your views.

Does a grade one mean perfection? Although the academy consistently achieves very high results, it is convinced that 99% is not good enough! We agree with the leaders, including the governors, that more of you could gain the top most grades. The academy knows well its strengths and plans are already in place to increase the level of independent learning to provide you with even more challenging work to optimise your performance. We hope that you will work closely with the staff so that there will never be a glitch in the glorious history of your academy.

Yours faithfully

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101850
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	343135
Inspection dates	7-8 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Carmen Rodney HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	994
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Keith Morley
Principal	Mr Steven Kenning
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2007
School address	Maberley Road Upper Norwood London SE19 2JH
Telephone number	020 8771 2261
Fax number	020 8771 7531
Email address	info@harriscrystalpalace.org.uk

Age group	11-18
Inspection date(s)	7-8 October 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 31 lessons, and held meetings with the principal, chair of governors, the chief executive, and groups of students, staff and a small group of parents. They observed the academy's work, and looked at the academy's self-evaluation and development plan, policies, students' work, and analysed 214 parental questionnaires as well 126 from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- students' progress during Key Stage 4, and in particular their progress in English
- the extent to which the academy's work ensures that no student is left behind in particular, the vulnerable and those from minority ethnic groups
- how well teaching and assessment are used to optimise outcomes
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in sustaining outcomes.

Information about the school

Harris City Academy Crystal Palace, formerly a city technology college, became an academy in September 2007, as a member of the Harris Federation, a very strong partnership of nine Harris schools in several London boroughs. The academy is much larger than the average secondary school. It is very popular and there are more applicants than places available; currently there are ten applicants for every available place.

The academy is ethnically diverse with the largest groups from White British heritage and Caribbean descent. The proportion of students with a first language other than English is well above average. None is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of students with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities is low. Students are drawn from a wide area across the inner city. In the sixth form, 37% of students are eligible for education maintenance allowance. The sixth form is the largest group within the single post-16 centre which serves four academies in the federation.

The principal was appointed in September 2008 when a new leadership team was also formed. The academy's main specialism is business and enterprise with technology. In addition, it gained a second specialism in 2009 to lead the Gifted and Talented programme across the federation. It is currently planning for a third specialism as a training school. It has gained many awards including Healthy School and Investors in People. It is the lead academy in the federation.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Harris City Academy Crystal Palace is an outstanding school that not only helps its students to achieve exceptionally high standards but also to be well prepared for the next stage of their life. The academy lives by its motto, 'all can achieve'; it therefore takes every measure possible to ensure that no child is left behind, irrespective of their ability, race, ethnicity, or gender. The message comes across strongly that parents share these views. Parents are very supportive of the academy and hold it in high regard. These comments, in response to the questionnaire and discussion, demonstrate the overwhelming support for the academy as a place of learning that is 'high achieving', 'secure', 'a prestigious school to attend', 'has a very good reputation and discipline' and 'meets each student's needs very well'.

Central to this highly successful school is the outstanding leadership and management. The principal leads from the front and is very well supported by leaders at all levels. His creative and innovative style has forged a cohesive leadership team that is unremitting in leading on agreed strategies to raise performance and does not flinch from giving tough messages. This inclusive leadership team builds on the best practices of the previous leader, blending traditional and innovative approaches to strengthen and sustain the 'Harris Way'. As a result, there is no slack in the robust systems on behaviour, dress code and strong work ethic which underpin the day-to-day running of the academy, where perceived barriers are not allowed to impact on students' achievement. The academy recognises that there is more to do to ensure that the vast majority of the most able students can gain an even higher percentage of the top most grades.

Outstanding teaching overall and exemplary use of assessment data, when combined with the creative and exciting curriculum, ensure that all students make rapid progress. Students like the corporate identity, which they refer to as the 'Harris factor'. The academy has successfully fostered an inclusive community which provides excellent opportunities for students to have a voice.

The academy's specialisms form an essential part of learning. Business enterprise and technology are used to drive standards, through increased independent learning such as the Personal eXtended Study (PXS); cross-curricular work, planned ventures in the school and local community and the expanding curriculum that is tailored to students' needs.

The academy's capacity for sustained improvement is outstandingly good. The leaders' uncompromising approach to helping all students thrive, irrespective of their

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starting points, is exemplified in the sustained and improving results year on year. Succession planning is extensive and based on systematic and accurate evaluation of provision. The passion among staff for excellence remains ignited because the leaders, including governors, have successfully communicated a very clear agenda for the academy becoming an even better beacon of excellence in education. The academy therefore acts as the bearer of excellence within the federation. Its outstanding monitoring and evaluation systems, provision and outcomes ensure that it is very well placed to maintain its position in the top 5% of schools nationally.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Build on the best practices in teaching to ensure that:

- **Main school**
 - a higher percentage of the most able students gain grades A*/A at GCSE.
- **Sixth form**
 - students make even faster progress by providing them with more opportunities to work independently and/or collaboratively in groups.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' achievement is outstanding. On entry to the academy, students' standards are average, though this is occasionally slightly better in some year groups. Students make outstanding progress from an average starting point. Analysis of the 2009 unvalidated results are far above expected standards, with a record of 99% students achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A* - C and 82% obtaining similarly high grades including English and mathematics. These results far exceeded the predicted average grades based on a number of 'official' measures. This remarkable achievement was possible as the 'Harris way', including high quality support; excellent teaching and assessment data to monitor progress were used unrelentingly to inspire students to learn. The academy is highly effective in helping vulnerable students to exceed expected standards for their groups nationally such as, for example, Looked after Children and those with a specific learning need. Additionally, it is also successful at helping minority ethnic groups. In particular students of African and Caribbean heritages buck the trend of underachievement. In all year groups, students are far ahead of age-related expectations.

There is little variation between subjects. The intense scrutiny of students' performance across subjects ensures that any 'failure' is dealt with 'ruthlessly' and efficiently. For example, in 2008, students made slower progress in English than in mathematics and science. Immediate changes in staffing, the curriculum and increased teaching time resulted in significant improvements in 2009. While standards are very high, the academy has already started to implement plans to increase the numbers of A*/A grades in all subjects.

The attitudes and behaviour of students are exemplary and contribute significantly to their outstanding progress. Students are very considerate of each other and relationships are warm; notably, they demonstrate a sense of strong moral values,

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show respect for others while valuing cultural and religious diversity. Students who experience minor difficulties in accepting the caring but strict approach receive support to enthuse them. Students say that they feel safe and secure. Inappropriate behaviour is rare and students from all ethnic groups were emphatic that racism is not tolerated and if any occurs, it is dealt with effectively and efficiently.

Students play an active and responsible part in the academy and the wider community. The student commission, school council and provision for community cohesion and personal and social education, contribute to them developing insights into citizenship. In this, the academy's outstanding provision and ethos are used very well to develop mature and articulate young people for the 21st century.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	1
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Outstanding teaching overall, excellent subject knowledge and relationships with students ensure that they learn in an extremely well-ordered and stimulating environment which inspires them. All teachers are committed to their students, have high expectations and provide the support necessary to help them achieve their aspirational targets. Lessons are highly structured, build on prior learning and include milestones to assess students' progress. Outstanding tracking systems ensure that teachers effectively use up-to-date information on students' progress to support them and prevent any underachievement.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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The systems of setting students and teaching small and/or single gender groups ensure that, for the most part, students can excel in their work. Teachers' excellent management of lessons ensures that pace is fast and resources such as information and communication technology are used as highly effective learning tools.

A further feature that supports the effectiveness of teaching very well is the skilful use of questions to develop students' thinking and reasoning skills. This provides teachers with valuable information about students' understanding. This comment is typical of students' recognition of what teachers do for them, 'I have never sat in a lesson that has been too easy for me'. Although this is the case for the vast majority, the academy acknowledges that more students could improve their performance further. Marking of students' work and their self and peer assessment provide them with an accurate evaluation of where they are and the improvements they need to make to move on to the next level.

The curriculum meets students' needs very well and, since the last inspection, it has been broadened to extend independent learning and meet the needs of individuals and groups. There are several innovative features. For example, independent learning is developed in the Personal eXtended Study (PXS) programme resulting in students carrying out action research. Additionally, a two-year programme of study in Key Stage 3 enables them to be fast-tracked. The increasing personalisation of the curriculum means that students have high quality and memorable learning which they enjoy. Students are highly complimentary of their varied curriculum experience and the extensive curricular opportunities which nurture talents.

Exemplary care, guidance and support pervade all aspects of the academy's provision. The staff know students very well and the close attention to their pastoral and academic needs is maintained from the start of induction in Year 6 through to the sixth form. Students appreciate the very high quality support, which they say is based on their 'teachers' analysis of their needs' and the help they are given to prioritise their work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal, ably supported by a vibrant senior team and middle managers, has successfully shared his vision for the future and steered the staff through the next steps to ensure that all students can make rapid progress. For example, the curriculum offers more creative subjects and the International Baccalaureate is

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planned for 2010. Professional development as an integral part of the provision makes the academy a centre of excellence for leading courses and working in partnership with the London Institute to provide a Master’s degree, tailored to the needs of the federation. The academy is progressive in its work and strategic planning is well considered. Consequently, the staff know they are consulted and feel highly valued.

One of the academy’s outstanding strengths lies in the cohesive community which leads to all staff, students, parents and governors working together as a team. There is comprehensive auditing of the academy’s work locally, nationally and internationally. The evaluation is rigorous and builds on the identified strengths. At this stage, the academy knows that further analysis will contribute to sharpening its plans to develop community cohesion further.

Governors are astute and very well informed. With the chief executive, they challenge the academy’s work through visits to faculties and lessons, regular monitoring, analysis of data, and direct reporting from leaders and managers at all levels. Procedures to ensure students’ safety are robust. Planning for improvement is extensive and although there are some limitations to the fabric of the building, outstanding outcomes remain the main priority.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students enter the sixth form with average attainment and make outstanding progress, in both academic and vocational courses, to achieve standards above the national average in most areas. This is achieved by good teaching from experienced post-16 teachers. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding,

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committed and responsive. There is a strong focus on improving outcomes with extensive intervention strategies, planning and self-evaluation. Previously good outcomes were exceeded in the sixth form in 2009 and any weaknesses are systematically eradicated. Teaching staff know, for example, that the highest attaining students need further opportunities to develop their independent learning skills to attain the top grades and are working hard to provide them.

The curriculum, through careful work across the federation, is broad and responsive to students' needs. Additionally, extensive extra-curricular provision benefits many students. Care, guidance and support are a truly outstanding feature of the provision for the sixth form. Students say that, 'teachers are always there for you if you need help with anything' and this was true when the current A-level students received their AS-level results and a team of staff were on hand to offer guidance about next steps. Effective work experience programmes, as well as students' impressive levels of self-confidence, personal development, and exemplary behaviour coupled to the guidance they receive prepares them exceptionally well for the future challenges. Students make a strong contribution to the vibrant sixth form community, the whole academy and the wider community. Effective engagement between the academy, students and their parents make an excellent contribution to outstanding outcomes.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The parents of over one fifth of students responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. The vast majority were overwhelmingly supportive of the academy's work. A very small and unrepresentative minority did not feel that the academy helped their child to have a healthy life style or helped them to support their child and prepare them for the future.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Harris City Academy Crystal Palace to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 214 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1222 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	93	47	115	54	5	2	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	83	39	129	61	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	91	44	106	51	10	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	88	43	113	55	4	2	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	92	44	116	55	1	0	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	29	127	61	18	19	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	21	140	67	25	12	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	67	33	122	60	12	6	4	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	60	29	135	66	9	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	89	43	111	53	8	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	21	135	69	16	8	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	73	35	130	62	5	2	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	110	48	110	48	1	0	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>the following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

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