

# The Harefield Academy

Case study



## Raising aspirations

**The Harefield Academy believes that every one of its students can – and will – achieve and be successful. It opened in September 2005, under the leadership of Principal Lynn Gadd. It replaced the failing John Penrose school, where exam results had fallen well below the national average.**

In common with the children of many failing schools, John Penrose students had stopped being encouraged to aspire. They weren't shown what success looked like, and they had low expectations of themselves.

When the Academy was first being planned, John Penrose students were involved in a workshop to design the uniform for their new school. Shown a number of images of animals, they were asked to pick the ones that best represented what their school felt like. They chose a slug, a donkey and a mongrel dog. They were then asked to select the animals that would best represent what they would like their school to be. They chose a panther, a thoroughbred race horse and a dolphin.

Since opening, conversations with The Harefield Academy students are now hugely positive. The first of their alumni have already started university courses, and sixth formers are attending university open days and planning for the future. Sporting achievement is also impressively high. Almost every child has aspirations, which are encouraged and facilitated.

Exam results have improved greatly, and the school has what OFSTED inspectors call 'ambitious but achievable' targets for even further improvement. In 2008, 55% of the school's GCSE entrants gained grade C or above in five subjects. A total of 29% of students gained five GCSEs including maths and English. At A Level, there was a 100% success rate.

This ethos of encouraging success is not limited to students. Teaching and support staff are also strongly encouraged to be constantly finding ways to stretch themselves and improve. For example, only 1% of England's teachers are Advanced Skills Teachers. Yet The Harefield Academy already has four ASTs.

Mrs Gadd says: "At The Harefield Academy we want the absolute best for our students, and by that we mean that we want them to be happy, safe, and successful in the way that they determine.

"We want the level of success to be as high as possible, no matter what it is. We want them to feel that they've got something to give to the community, we want them to show respect to others and to be respected. And we want them to leave school in seven years' time feeling that they've had a very valuable and special experience at The Harefield Academy."

### The Harefield Academy

**Principal**  
Lynn Gadd

**Chair of Governors**  
David Meller

**Sponsors**  
David Meller

**Address**  
Northwood Way  
Harefield, Uxbridge  
Middlesex UB9 6ET

Tel: 01895 822108  
[www.theharefieldacademy.org](http://www.theharefieldacademy.org)

## The specialisms

**The Harefield Academy specialises in health, wellbeing and sport. Principal Lynn Gadd says: “It is a really exciting combination and it has very many ways of allowing us to be successful.”**

“We have a focus on healthy eating so that the students learn through their catering and food technology lessons how to cook for themselves, and we have a fantastic chef who provides excellent food. We’ve got a programme of working with the community to allow both ourselves, the parents and our young people to work on being healthy.”

The sports facilities at The Harefield Academy are beyond impressive. The school boasts astro turf pitches, dances studios, gymnasia, dry training pitches, physiotherapy treatment rooms, a swimming pool and a partnership with a local outward bounds centre which sees students mountain biking and climbing as part of their activities.

The school is also home to the Watford Football Club’s academy for young players. This means that the talented youngsters have a sound education, and all students at the school benefit from world class football coaching. The Harefield Academy’s Under 15 Football Team this year won the English Schools’ Football Association Cup.

The school boasts a number of other elite athletes among its students. The members of the 5th World Age Group Championships sports acrobatics silver medallist team train and study at the school. So do the England under 14 table tennis champion, and his training partner, who ranks as the country’s No 3.

But crucially at Harefield, sport is not just for the super talented. The huge range of activities allows every single youngster to find something they enjoy and can improve at. As well as all the normal sports, activities include street dance, trampolining, table tennis, horse riding, golf and cheerleading. There are even dance mats sessions, where students follow moves displayed on a big screen in the fitness gym.

## The Academy sponsor

**The sponsors of The Harefield Academy are all former directors of Watford Football Club, and the school has a very active and productive partnership with the club. Young players from its own academy receive their education at the school, while the school benefits from world class soccer coaching, and the motivation of having elite athletes as classmates.**

Principal Mrs Gadd says: “We enjoy a very special relationship with our Academy sponsors. They prompt us to think differently. We have an absolute agreement as to how they would like a young person to be as they leave The Harefield Academy so we have that shared vision.

“On a day-to-day basis they allow me and the educationists and the other people who are working at the Academy to make the decisions.

“They inspire us to greater things. They can make suggestions that are sometimes completely out of the blue, but make a difference to our community. We thoroughly enjoy working with them, it’s a very special and unique relationship.”



## Doing things differently

**One of the things that makes Academies different from maintained schools is that they have the freedom to structure and deliver education differently.**

At The Harefield Academy, the doors open at 7.30am for breakfast club, and lessons start at 8.15am.

Principal Mrs Gadd says: "Our students don't have a traditional break because we feel that that's a time when things can often go wrong."

Instead, students have 45 minute sessions of supervised personal learning time – effectively, homework or research time – in 'vertical groups'. These comprise family groups of students from all different years, and it's not uncommon to see children from Year 7 asking sixth form members of their group for help and advice.

Food is given to students during personal learning time, so that as well as getting ahead with their homework, they can recharge their batteries, have a drink, and maintain concentration through the rest of the day.

Lessons emphasise 'active learning' so that students learn through doing, as well as being taught in a more traditional way.

Mrs Gadd says: "We encourage our children to do as much of their homework during the day in homework times that so that after school they can participate in as many after school activities as possible because we want them to be rounded people – we don't want them to have to take huge amounts of work home.

"But obviously they've got to meet the demands of courses and to meet the basic requirements of a course."

There is a half hour lunch break in the school's restaurant – which looks like, and serves the same standard of food as – a modern café.

Officially, school finishes at 2.30pm, but the majority of children stay on to use computers, finish homework, or take part in sports training or one or two of the school's many, many after school activities, which include everything from drama to samba drumming.

Mrs Gadd says: "We've also got a number of day boarders at the moment, which is quite an interesting development. These are young people who arrive very early in the morning and don't go home sometimes until seven or eight at night.

"They are youngsters who have a particular talent in their sporting activity and during the day they have extra coaching, and after school they catch up with their lessons, they do their homework, they have their tea, they do more training, and that's proven to be very successful because that's the amount of time you need to put into a sport or an activity to really hit the big time."

# OFSTED

**In January 2007, an OFSTED inspection of The Harefield Academy found that “students made progress that was better than that found nationally, particularly in Years 10 and 11”. Overall, inspectors found that, “The Academy has made good progress towards raising standards”.**

They said that there were “ambitious, but achievable, targets set for examination results over the next three years”.

### Behaviour and attitudes

The OFSTED report states: “Students regard the Academy as a safe place to learn. They respect and care for each other well. There are few instances of bullying and those that do occur are dealt with swiftly and effectively. There is an evident spirit of mutual respect between students and teachers. Most students have a very good attitude to learning. They behave well in lessons and are keen to do well.

“Behaviour in the academy is good. Students move calmly and sensibly around the Academy and most arrive punctually to lessons. Most students look smart and wear the recently introduced uniform with pride. Attendance has continued to improve and is now satisfactory.”

### Sixth form

OFSTED inspectors reported: “Staff know each student well, and care, guidance and support are good. The Academy provides good advice to Year 11 students on option choices in the sixth form. Advice on options after the sixth form is good and students feel involved in the life of the Academy. As a result, numbers are rising and set to rise even more rapidly next year.”

### Inclusion centre

OFSTED said: “The Harefield Academy aims to meet the needs of every individual student. The work that takes place in the inclusion centre is outstanding. It is highly effective in supporting students who may be experiencing a wide range of difficulties and is very successful in helping them to return to their usual classes.

“Students enjoy working hard in the inclusion centre and the quality of work produced during their lessons is good.”

### Teaching

The inspectors said: “Over half of the lessons observed were good; a small number were outstanding. Inspectors saw no inadequate teaching.

“A key feature of the better lessons is the high expectation teachers have of what students can achieve. With this in mind, teachers plan interesting activities that challenge students appropriately, they maintain a fast pace and keep students working hard. Teachers ask probing questions to check that students are learning effectively and that they understand the points being made.

“Students enjoy being kept busy and respond very well to the teacher’s enthusiasm and belief in what they can achieve.”

They also said: “The principal has established a strong and practical vision for the future. She sets high standards and innovation is supported effectively.”

### Extra-curricular activities

OFSTED found: “There are extensive and varied opportunities for enrichment activities, particularly in music and sport, with high levels of student participation. The breadth of extra-curricular provision, including outside visits continues to grow and adds considerable enjoyment to Academy life.”

### \*Percentage of students at The Harefield Academy...

<b>Who have free school meals</b>	20
<b>With special educational needs</b>	32
<b>Boys</b>	58
<b>Girls</b>	42

\* Source: OFSTED

## The uniform



Youngsters at The Harefield Academy have a very distinctive, smart uniform which was designed in collaboration with the students themselves. It combines a smart maroon blazer with trousers, skirts, shirts and ties.

One of the Academy's Partners is BHS. The department store chain has underwritten the cost of uniforms, so that blazers cost only £18, and all other items are similarly affordable.

Sixth formers wear smart office-type clothing of their own choice.

Principal Mrs Gadd says: "Uniform at The Harefield Academy is a vital part of our success. It sets the right image. Youngsters can be proud that they're wearing something very unique and that sets the right image for the Academy and for themselves.

"We want them to feel proud, we want them to feel that they're unique, and the uniform is all part of that image and it works for them. It's the same for everyone, there's no standing out to be different."

Parent Lucille Esson adds: "The uniform at the school is very, very smart. What's been good is that the children had initial input into the uniform, which means that they're more likely to wear it because they're happy with the way it looks. They have a blazer, which is very important. It gives them pride in the school, and it does affect the way in which they work."

## The people



**Lynn Gadd,  
Principal**

Our sports specialism, we think, is second to none because it encourages everyone to be good at an activity. It doesn't matter whether it's exercise mats or a traditional sport, there's excellence for everyone. And then we build up to the top of the pyramid where we have our elite athletes and they provide a huge inspiration for everyone that works with them.

I think that to be successful, children need to know what success looks like. They need lots of people who can model success and people that they feel in touch with, so that might be a local person who's made good, it might be – because of our specialism – a top sportsman or woman, it might be someone they haven't realised has had to work hard to become successful.

Success in The Harefield Academy comes in many forms. It's certainly about showing the students through role models what being successful looks like, and how they've become successful. It's about looking at any way to celebrate the success of students, no matter how small or how great, and it's also giving opportunity to see themselves, be it on photographs, or videos in the local paper and giving rewards whenever we possibly can.

I think every parent and every young person wants to be known by their headteacher or their principal. I think that's it's a right that they think I know something about them that is quite unique so I try to take time to have a quiet word with students, to perhaps ask how something's going along, and certainly to return calls to parents and to be in touch with parents whenever possible. It's about understanding their context, listening to what they have to say, and to try to respond to needs so that people feel they're valued and wanted at the Academy.

We've got a lot of success stories at The Harefield Academy, and I like to talk about a range, because it's not just one aspect of our school life that we like to celebrate. But these are both examples. We've got a really successful inclusion centre. We haven't yet permanently excluded a student, which I think is a great record. And the students in inclusion are beginning to find their own success and are therefore not needing quite as much care and attention as they might have done in a normal situation.

At the other end of the spectrum, we've got national and international teams now of students that are performing at a very high level and that's not just good for the individual, be it that they're a gymnast or a footballer or a table tennis player, but our whole community can celebrate that success and be part of it, which for where we've come from is very, very important.



**David Meller,  
Lead Academy  
sponsor**

I and my fellow sponsors at the school are all ex directors of Watford Football Club. We wanted to get the club involved because we felt that sport was a very important part of education, and we wanted to help Watford achieve more with their young academy.

Watford's always been known for its grass roots influence in football, and what we've got at this school is we have all of the young academy players come here, study here and they train here, so they get a much better education because they are at a school like this. They spend a number of hours a day in training, and they also have a proper education. Obviously a lot of footballers don't make it to the final grade, so they can fall back on their other studies, and we see that as a very important part of our being as a school.

I think Academies are incredibly important to the education system. I think they are a new broom and whatever you want to achieve can be achieved in an Academy. Obviously the investment in new buildings is fantastic, but even before we had this new building, the ethos of the school completely changed. I think the involvement of business people or charities in the school is an enormous help to the whole system.

My personal motivation for becoming an Academy sponsor was that I didn't have a terribly good education myself, and I believe that every child has a right to achieve to the best of their abilities and I am very glad to have this opportunity to help provide the environment where that can happen.

## The people (cont.)



**Lucille Esson,  
Parent of Holly, 12**

My daughter Holly is 12-years-old. She's in Year 8. She's a dedicated swimmer – she trains seven days a week – but she's also a child who loves her academic study. She's a very happy little girl who loves coming to school.

Holly likes the short day of the school. They start at 8.15 in the morning, and finish at 2.30, which for someone who's involved in sports means that they can still do their sport after school. They have a half hour lunch break, they have personal learning time when they can do homework in the morning, which again is very important. The short day really helps her to get involved in after school clubs within the Academy so she can still be involved in life here.

Holly's achieved an awful lot at the Academy. At her last school she was classified as an average child. Here she's gone from strength to strength. She has been chosen to take part in maths competitions, chess competitions, and had two weeks in a language summer school, which for her has been fantastic. It's such a boost to her confidence. Her teachers are always encouraging her. She had problems in her last school as she wasn't recognised as a child who worked particularly hard, but here the staff continually recognise it and it only makes her push herself harder to achieve higher levels.

Holly's education is very important. She needs to be happy to achieve, she needs to be made to feel confident in what she's doing, and also to be working with children who are academically on the same level as her to create healthy competition in the classroom. There needs to be a good range of subjects at both GCSE and A Level.

The school has a very calm atmosphere and that is very important as it allows children to achieve higher academic levels in their studies.



**Riaan Huyser,  
Science Advanced  
Skills Teacher**

I am very lucky to be part of a team of four advanced skills teacher in the Academy. What students enjoy is that we do very relevant topics. We teach them science that's relevant to this day and age – for example, things that are in the news every day, like X-rays, mobile phones, how things work in hospitals. They don't just learn a lot of theory, they learn about things they see on a daily basis and wonder how they work. It brings science alive, and they do really enjoy it.

We use a lot of active learning so the students do not just sit down and listen, they actually have to get involved in learning. They learn through doing. They find things out through experiencing them, through investigating them, by experimenting.

What I enjoy most about teaching at the Academy is that we can think outside of the box and do things outside of the box. I really enjoy seeing the difference that's happened in the last year or two – our increased results in grades A to C... we can see a difference in the students every day, how they improve, how their teaching and learning is just getting better and better. That is what makes me happy as a teacher at The Harefield Academy.

We have a lot of students who want to pursue scientific careers. What we do to cater for them is we adapt our topics and our curriculum to cater for each of their needs. We offer a big variety of subjects in maths, science and sports.

We obviously have a big range of students, ability wise. So what we've done in the last year or two is we've changed our curriculum into a three-year GCSE curriculum, and only a two-year Key Stage 3. So this offers the more able students more time to focus on their GCSE results. They achieve more because they're now able to do three GCSEs in science, for example. And students who are less able, who struggle more, have more time to get a better result.

We've recently been studying how drugs affect bodies. Students have investigated how a stimulant like caffeine in Coca Cola or in coffee affects their reaction times. We have measured reaction times online and they've found out exactly how the body reacts to a stimulant like caffeine.

The progress that Academies make can not only be seen in the behaviour of students, but also through the results. Since we have been an Academy, we've made huge progress and we've seen how the students have improved, how their results have improved, and how their behaviour has improved, and that's just absolutely fantastic.





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