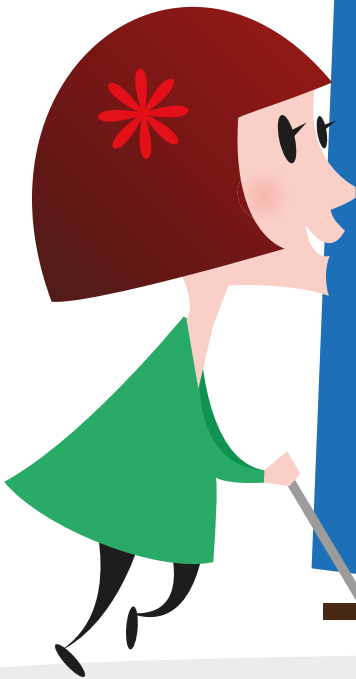




Capital City Academy London

Case study



Raising aspirations

Capital City Academy opened in 2003, replacing the failing Willesden High School in Brent, North West London. The school's purpose-built Foster and Partners building was opened by Prime Minister Tony Blair the following year.

It's an impressive building, that is home to an equally impressive regime of teaching and care that has given hundreds of children belief in themselves, and high hopes for their futures.

Capital City Academy's students come from a huge range of backgrounds, and more than 50% do not have English as a first language. Many are from families seeking asylum.

It's a lively school, with lively students whose enthusiasm is under the constant supervision of staff patrolling the corridors and gallery. Bright, and often surprisingly accomplished works of student art line the corridors, alongside notices for the school's 150 after school clubs and activities, including everything from sports journalism to English language classes for parents.

The Academy has excellent ICT facilities, with computers available for all students to use throughout the day and after school. Since 2007, the school has also been home to a Microsoft Academy – part of the Microsoft Academy Programme – which allows students and members of the community to train and gain accredited qualifications in Microsoft technologies.

The specialisms

Capital City Academy's specialisms are sport and the arts. Performing arts are an important part of the school, and there are two major productions staged each year in its fully equipped auditorium.

The school also stages an annual Arts Festival during the summer holidays. Activities including stained glass window making, stone carving and mosaic are all enjoyed by students during the week. The Academy also organises regular trips to museums and to the theatre.

Capital City Academy's sports facilities include a large, fully equipped sports hall and an all-weather pitch. A total of 180 students at the school are in junior athlete performance programmes. And for the school's elite athletes, the curriculum is adapted and personalised to combine academic and sporting development.

Former professional footballer Garth Crooks became a trustee of the Academy in 2009.

The specialisms do not just have an impact on gifted and talented students.

Principal Philip O'Hear says: "Our specialisms are sport and the arts, and in both cases we've developed a wide range of key partnerships. In sport, one of our most key partnerships is the partnership with London Capital Basketball, London's only semi-professional club in the British Basketball League, and they coach

our students, they run their own teams here – we're their home ground. They also supply other services to the school like helping to supervise out of hours community activities, and they supply some of our out of hours security staff. That brings all sorts of positive role models into the school, and enhances the opportunities we can offer.

"We're doing the same thing with other clubs, in tennis, in judo, in swimming. We're supporting performance athletes across a range of disciplines, including for example, horse riding, and it's for some of those students that we've pushed furthest our flexing and personalising of the curriculum in order to make sure that their sporting development and their academic development conflict as little as possible.

"Out of our sports specialisms also come a really quite outstanding and innovative approach to student leadership which goes now way beyond sports and includes the arts. So we've got arts leaders going into primary schools, and we've got modern foreign language leaders going into primary schools.

"Lunchtimes here are run by paid student supervisors who are now as young as Year 10, and sixth formers work in the catering team as managers of the tills and managers of the queues. All of those things came from the pioneering work in leadership we did through sport. We believe that sport and its methodologies, its emphasis on teamwork and leadership does pervade the curriculum in the Academy quite widely – likewise the arts."





The uniform

Students at Capital City Academy don't wear blazers and ties. Their uniform is a smart but practical royal blue sweatshirt with a polo shirt, in different colours according to the year the student is in.

The dress code is rigorously monitored and enforced. At the start of the school day, students stand in line to enter the building, and must remove outdoor coats as they do so. Uniformed support staff monitor what students are wearing. Hoodies and baseball caps are not permitted, and every student has a locker to keep their belongings in.

The results

	Percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs, including maths and English
2001 (Predecessor school results)	9.6
2002 (Predecessor school results)	6.2
2004 (First year of new Academy results)	16.7
2005	11.5
2006	18.3
2007	23.4
2008	26.7
2009	30.5

The number of students gaining five or more GCSEs at A*-C including maths and English is increasing year on year, at a rate of 2.3%. The total number of children gaining this benchmark has increased by 13.8 % since the Academy opened.

In 2009, Capital City Academy recorded its best ever GCSE results. A total of 59% of pupils gained five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, and 31% gained five or more A*-C including maths and English.



OFSTED

Capital City Academy’s latest OFSTED inspection – in November 2008 – was glowing, reporting that the school was “good”, its curriculum “exciting and stimulating”, and its care, guidance and support “outstanding”.

The report said that leadership at Capital City Academy was excellent, and that staff were successfully raising the students’ aspirations. It found that staff were helping many students overcome significant barriers to learning, boosting achievement and fostering personal development.

Student development

OFSTED inspectors said: “Teaching is good, and results in good progress in lessons. Students want to learn and they respond eagerly to well planned and stimulating lessons.

“Participation in sport develops students’ leadership skills and confidence. It also fosters the excellent response that they have to living healthy lifestyles. Work in the arts enables students to express themselves in different ways. For example, students who have experienced trauma in their home countries share their feelings through powerful work in art.

“Behaviour is good and support for those at risk of exclusion is exemplary. The Academy’s well targeted efforts have led to a steady rise in attendance rates, which are now just above the national average.”

Sixth Form

OFSTED inspectors found: “Students spoke very positively about the quality of teaching that they receive. They particularly value the range of different approaches teachers use and the depth of their subject knowledge. They view the support provided by teachers outside of lessons as equally valuable, saying that ‘they are super people’.

“Students are encouraged to aim high and they respond well to this. They receive regular feedback on how well they are doing and their progress is carefully tracked, their personal development and wellbeing are outstanding. The students are confident, articulate and mature young people who are a credit to the Academy and excellent role models for younger students.

“The contribution they make to the Academy is excellent. As well as carrying out community service every week, they undertake many activities of their own devising, such as raising funds for projects in the locality and overseas. The students take their roles as senior members of the school very seriously and play a significant part in its day-to-day running. They felt that coming to the Academy had been of great benefit to them.”

Achievements and standards

OFSTED said: “The gap between the Academy’s results and the national figure has closed rapidly. This is most noticeable at Key Stage 3, where results in 2008 were in line with last year’s national figures in mathematics and science and exceptionally high in English, where 96% of students reached the level expected for their age. As at least half of these students speak English as an additional language, this is a remarkable achievement.”

Curriculum and other activities

OFSTED found: “Students have access to a wide range of academic and vocational courses. This increases students’ motivation and numbers staying in education or training after the age of 16 are high.

“The range of activities, clubs and events before, after and outside of school is impressive and greatly enhances students’ experiences.”

The people



Alex Thomas,
Principal

Ever since the Academy opened, it's been oversubscribed with between 400 and 500 applications each year for the 196 places. I don't think necessarily that an Academy is better in principle than any other good school, but what being an Academy has allowed us to do is to build very quickly a really good school. OFSTED judged us good with outstanding features over the last week. We have been able to provide in this area – which has lacked it for a long time – a really good school for parents to choose.

Why does being an Academy help you to do that very quickly? And in a way that allows you to put down deep roots and that is sustainable? I think that's because you do have a completely fresh start. And the Academy sponsors and governors – who have high expectations of success and experience of success in their own lives – certainly won't stand around and wait if things aren't moving quickly. So you get that kind of pressure and that zest. Also, you have freedoms over the curriculum, and freedoms over how you employ staff, which we've used well to provide a flexible curriculum and enhanced conditions for staff which means we provide a very rich extra-curricular offer to our students. All of those things have helped us get a very good school established very quickly.

But at the core of any good school is really good teaching and learning. I think that what we've managed to do here is put down really secure systems for managing behaviour, for supporting and developing teachers, alongside a width of horizons, a real raising of expectations, which has really given everyone a lift. Put all that together and you can create something quite special, and I believe that's what we've done here at Capital City Academy.

There's been a lot of talk about innovation as part of Academies, and there are certainly things we do here that are innovative and developing rapidly, but to create a good school you have to pay attention to basics – things like uniform, behaviour and discipline – and one of the things I'm proud about is that each year we notice a significant further improvement in behaviour. That's absolutely crucial because nobody can learn in an undisciplined environment, nobody can be happy in a school where there's no sense of belonging – and uniform certainly helps create that – and nobody can learn and achieve without pride. Pride in their uniform, pride in their school is something I know you'll find when you talk to our students.

We want for our children exactly what is stated in our vision, which is to provide exceptional opportunities for personal and academic success for our students and their community. For me, it's a joy being head of a school which I genuinely believe is delivering that vision.



Xavier, 17,
Head Boy

In the Academy we are like a family. We are a whole community where all students will talk and socialise with each other. We're not segregated by age.

I think the way we dress in the school is exceptional. We set the standard for the younger students. We dress smartly. We're not allowed to wear trainers or hoodies or jeans. If we're not dressed smartly, then that would give the younger children permission to not dress smartly, and that would create chaos in the school.

My mum feels very happy about the way I'm progressing here. When I started here in year seven in 2003 I had lower than average grades. With the support of the Academy and the teachers in school and after school I was able to pass my GCSEs and go on to do some wonderful A Levels – so I am really happy with that.

I've made most progress in my English. When I started my English was way below average but I got lots of support from the teachers and I passed my GCSE. Now I'm doing an A Level in English Literature, which I would never have thought I would do. I love it.

When I leave the Academy I would like to go to university and study medicine and become a doctor. I would like to do this because I want to help and support others and medicine is something I can take anywhere in the world.

The people (cont.)



**Constance, 15,
student Capital City
Academy**

The Academy has a lot of resources for the students – a lot of sports, and the teachers are really kind. They're really friendly and they make lessons fun so we're learning, but it doesn't feel hard. I've made a lot of progress in maths because my teacher is funny. It's not even the jokes he makes, it's just the way he teaches, the way he makes the work seem so simple when it's actually A grade.

We do a lot of creative writing at school. I love it. We also study cultural poetry. My favourite poet is Benjamin Zephania.

After school I'd like to move on to college or university and hopefully study for a bit longer so that I can become a family lawyer or a business woman... or maybe an author.



**Helga Gladbaum,
Local Community
Trustee**

Being a trustee of Capital City Academy is a role that is very close to my heart. I was a local councillor for many years and saw the Academy right through from planning stages. I used to be a primary school teacher and so when I was asked to be a trustee I was very happy to accept.

It's a very special place. Look all around you and you can see the wonderful artwork of the students. This is a place where children of all abilities and backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed and do well.

My role is to be a critical friend to the Academy. I help in the process of continual improvement at the school.

We have this constant dialogue with the principal of the Academy on how we can improve everything that's going on in the school.

What impresses me about the Academy is if you just look around you, you see the most wonderful displays of art. What impresses me as well is the commitment of the principal and of the staff, and also the wide range and diversity of the student population. It's a sheer pleasure to be involved with the Academy.



**Rose Donald,
English Teacher**

Our students really enjoy that we do such a range of different tasks and that we study a wide range of literature. They also get the opportunity to bring their own ideas in and explore them rather than do something that's just prescriptive.

Children who don't have English as a first language are supported. We give them opportunities to study in groups who share their own language and sometimes to bring their own language inside the classroom. We support all of our students – whether they're struggling or talented.

We're doing a really interesting project at the moment with the British Museum where we're taking a Shakespeare play and resetting it in a modern context. We're going to get them to rewrite versions of the script of Romeo and Juliet. The students are acting and recording it, and it makes Shakespeare much more relevant and interesting to them, and enables them to show that they understand the language of Shakespeare.

With students who aren't so academic, it's important to make sure that they feel comfortable in the class at the same time as helping them to develop their own educational strengths.



**Philomena
Bouzemada,
Parent**

I have two sons at the Academy, and I'm very proud of the progress they're both making.

I want them to be happy – I think that's what most parents want. I have high aspirations for them too, and I think they have high aspirations for themselves. I would love them to go on to higher education, and I think the Academy will support them to do this.

The school gives them lots of opportunities to develop personally and also the school does monitor them quite closely with regards to their academic achievement.



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