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Thursday 7 October 2010

Mr Chamberlain  
Executive Principal  
Clacton Coastal Academy  
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Essex  
CO15 3JL

Dear Mr Chamberlain

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Clacton Coastal Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Elaine Taylor HMI to your academy on Tuesday 5 and Wednesday 6 October 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, two groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Board and two representative of the Academies Enterprise Trust. Inspectors observed a number of part-lessons on both days, including some joint observations with senior staff.

### **Context**

Clacton Coastal Academy opened in September 2009. It has 1850 students, 310 of whom are in the sixth form. It specialises in Media arts and English. It is much larger than average and operates on two sites over a mile apart. Most students come from Clacton, where the level of deprivation is higher than that found nationally. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and the percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including statements is significantly higher than national averages. The majority of students are White British, very few are from

minority ethnic backgrounds. Student mobility is higher than average. The vast majority of staff from the two predecessor schools transferred to the academy. An executive principal has led the academy since its opening; a number of senior and middle leader appointments have been made. A new governing board was formed in March 2010.

### **Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning**

The majority of students join the academy in Year 7 with attainment that is well below the national average. In its first year, the academy has made dramatic improvements. Results in Key Stage 4 have risen sharply; 75% of students in Year 11 attained five GCSE C grades and the percentage of students attaining at least five GCSEs including English and mathematics more than doubled to 38%. These improvements are a direct result of carefully targeted interventions to ensure that those students capable of achieving at least a grade C in GCSE and vocational examinations received the additional support they needed to help them succeed.

Standards in Key Stage 3 also improved, albeit it at a slower rate. Based on their very low starting points on entry in Year 7, a significantly higher proportion of students made much better progress; more than half of Year 9 students attained the expected levels in English and in mathematics. The interventions used to raise achievement in 2010 are being repeated this year; early evidence from monitoring shows that currently, most Year 11 students are on track to achieve what is expected of them. More than half of Year 11 students attained at least a grade C in English, one of the academy's specialisms but a much smaller proportion did so in mathematics. Senior leaders acknowledge that the quality of teaching in mathematics requires further improvement.

Senior leaders have rightly prioritised the collation of accurate performance data to track students' progress and identify those students at risk of underachieving. Further refinements have been made this year to present this information in a manageable format to all staff, but these are not yet firmly embedded. Analysis of results shows that girls attain slightly better than boys and fewer students than last year attained the very highest grades. Students that have special educational needs and/or difficulties and the academy's learners whose circumstances have made them vulnerable attained equally as well as others. Vocational awards make a significant contribution to raising overall achievement.

Based on their low starting points, students in the sixth form achieve satisfactorily. Results in A level and vocational awards are below national averages but showed some improvement in 2010; overall pass rates improved and the proportion of students attaining A\* to B grades also increased. The depth of analysis undertaken by senior staff of the results noted in Year 11 is not replicated in Years 12 and 13.

**Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Students told inspectors that they feel safe and enjoy life in the academy. If bullying occurs they say it is dealt with promptly. Behaviour is managed effectively. The number of exclusions has fallen significantly. Strategies to improve attendance are having a positive impact and rates are improving gradually. The academy has strengthened its monitoring procedures to promote regular attendance and to tackle persistent absence. It has not yet enlisted the full support of all parents and carers to help them secure broadly average attendance rates and encourage positive habits needed for the work-place. Most students lead healthy lifestyles, but this is compromised by a poor selection of food at lunchtimes. Students expressed some concerns about lunchtime arrangements but arrangements to share their views to senior leaders are under-developed. Sixth form students take an active part in the life of the academy and are positive role models for younger students. Their voice is heard and they have campaigned successfully for an improved common room and dining facilities.

**The effectiveness of provision**

Inspectors agree with the academy's own view that the quality of teaching has improved and is satisfactory overall, but found that too much is only satisfactory rather than good. Positive relations between staff and students are a common feature of lessons but there are few opportunities to learn independently, discuss ideas or improve students' oracy skills. The pace of learning drops when teachers talk too much and students have to listen for too long. Questioning is not always targeted to check students' understanding and teachers readily accept answers from a few regular volunteers. A common planning format is starting to generate greater consistency in the quality of lesson plans. Teachers often identify the different needs of individuals, but most lessons involve all students undertaking the same tasks. Good use of data projectors bring lessons to life and motivates students to learn.

For most students, 'discipline with dignity' governs the positive way they interact with others and apply themselves to their learning. A few younger students do not understand this and some less-experienced teachers do not have back-up strategies to manage off-task behaviour effectively. Teaching assistants do not always provide effective support for students who find learning difficult because they are not always actively engaged in supporting individual learners. Periodic assessments help to track students' progress. Teachers are making increasing use of this information to determine aspects of study that need revisiting to secure students understanding. Marking does not provide students with regular written feedback, or challenge poorly presented work.

The curriculum is increasingly inclusive. Learning 'pathways' meet the needs of students of all abilities and interests. They include early entry to accredited courses in Year 9 and a wide range of accreditation at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

Links with other providers support a wide range of vocational opportunities and alternative provision for those in danger of disengagement from GCSE studies. Media arts are popular with students; by sharing its specialist technologies with other areas of the curriculum it makes a significant contribution to raising overall achievement. Not all students engage in enrichment activities after school. Care and support is good but some students are dissatisfied with the information, advice and guidance they are given when making decisions towards the end of each key stage.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers**

The academy inherited a legacy of underachievement from both of its predecessor schools, both of which were National Challenge schools. This, and the late amalgamation into an academy, which was not finalised until August 2009, presented a formidable challenge to raising achievement. The executive principal has wasted no time in delivering immediate improvements by sharing his vision for the academy and raising the expectations of students and staff about what young people in Clacton can achieve. Decisive action has been taken to eradicate inadequate teaching and challenge the under-performance tolerated in the past. Action plans include a revised code of conduct for students and far greater accountability of staff. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation by a strengthened team of senior leaders is driving further improvement. They know where the strengths and weaknesses lie. Capacity to make further improvements is good. Most subject leaders recognise the role they have to play in this process but the roles and responsibilities of some pastoral leaders are not as transparent as they could be. Evaluation of outcomes in the sixth form is not as rigorous as Key Stage 4. Governors provide good support for the executive principal and closely monitor the impact of senior leaders against rigorous key performance indicators. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding fully meet requirements.

### **External support**

The support provided by the school improvement partner is highly valued by senior leaders, particularly the guidance and support offered to validate the quality of teaching and advice on how to improve it. The Academies Enterprise Trust provides a wealth of good support through extensive networking and sharing of good practice, staff development and training. The unrelenting monitoring of senior leaders' actions to improve provision and outcomes for students makes a significant contribution to the academy's development.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Increase the proportion of students attaining a minimum of five GCSEs including English and mathematics by:
  - sharing the strategies deployed to improve results in English with the teachers and leaders of mathematics.
  
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
  - providing students with opportunities to learn independently, and reinforcing their literacy and oracy skills in all lessons
  - planning and delivering different activities matched to individual students' needs
  - reiterating the principle of 'discipline with dignity' and ensuring less-experienced teachers know how to manage behaviour effectively
  - providing all students with regular written feedback and challenging poorly presented work
  - deploying teacher assistants more effectively
  
- Raise attendance and reduce persistent absence so both are similar to national averages by:
  - continuing to apply the range of strategies being used to promote regular attendance
  - fostering the full support of parents and carers in improving their child's attendance.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the chair of the governing board and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**