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27 March 2012

Mr C Wakefield
Interim Principal
The Marlowe Academy
Stirling Way
Ramsgate
CT12 6NB

Dear Mr Wakefield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Marlowe Academy

Following my visit with Anne Duffy, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Michael Stanton, additional inspector, to the academy on 21–22 March 2012, 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 the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) may be appointed in all subject areas.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the academy's trustees, the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit, the local Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and the team inspectors.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2011

- Raise students' attainment and strengthen their progress, especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - teachers and students share high expectations
 - teaching consistently provides challenging activities that engage students' interests and maintain their motivation
 - lesson-planning and teaching match the needs of all students and support the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum
 - information about students' attainment and progress is rigorously and regularly reviewed so that interventions to tackle underperformance and loss of momentum are prompt and well-directed
 - students are encouraged to show initiative in their learning, to ask challenging questions and present independently explored arguments
 - a range of assessment strategies - such as probing questions in class, students' reviews of each others' work, and marking that combines praise with precise guidance – enables students to make good progress.

- Ensure that trustees and governors drive sustainable academy improvement by:
 - building capacity securely at all levels of leadership and management to improve provision and outcomes in all subjects and for all groups of pupils
 - holding the academy's leaders and managers to account for the impact of their work, setting challenging targets and promoting initiatives to raise students' attainment and accelerate their progress.

- Take further steps to improve attendance rates, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.

- Ensure that sixth form students are guided onto appropriate courses and that their progress is closely monitored so that underperformance and loss of motivation are responded to quickly and effectively.

Special measures: monitoring of The Marlowe Academy

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 21–22 March 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, visited lessons and additional support sessions, and scrutinised documents. They met with senior and middle leaders, other staff and a group of trustees, including the Chair of the Trustees and another trustee. They spoke to students in meetings, in lessons and around the site.

Context

Since the last inspection, the academy has continued to be led by a full-time interim Principal, supported by part-time associate and executive Principals. They work for an education development company, contracted in at the start of the academic year 2011-2012. A substantive Principal has been appointed for September 2012 but will start work for two days a week from the start of the summer term. Seven teachers have left and four new ones have joined the staff so that some teaching is covered by temporary teachers in the unfilled vacancies. In addition to these, five temporary advanced skills teachers have been appointed in a range of full and part-time roles in mathematics, English, science and information and communication technology.

Achievement of students at the academy

Students are making better progress than they were at the time of the last inspection because the quality of teaching has improved. Students say they are learning more and their work shows they are aiming for more challenging targets, notably in English and mathematics. However, their attainment remains well below national age-related expectations, including in vital areas such as literacy. They are not making the good progress needed to overcome the very low starting points of many.

Students' skills in articulating ideas verbally and in writing are poor, and they lack the fluent reading skills needed to access learning. Students are starting to make better progress in reading because of a new programme and a higher profile for reading throughout the academy. Younger students especially note a growing enjoyment of books, and most students read quietly during tutor time. They also enjoy the 'drop everything and read' (DEAR) sessions. Students make good progress in other lessons which directly address their low literacy levels. For example, in a Year 7 science lesson, students increased their vocabulary by describing different habitats. However, weak reading skills still hold students back, so in subjects such as mathematics they do not always understand written questions well enough to know what to do.

Teaching staff are now better focused on addressing students' most pressing needs, and this is bringing about improvement. For example, Year 11 students benefit from extra intervention lessons and individual tuition, and this is helping them to make up lost ground. In line with their peers, disabled students, and the very large number who have special educational needs, are starting to make better progress. Nevertheless, their achievement remains the weakest in the academy because provision is not fully meeting their needs.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- raise students' attainment and strengthen their progress, especially in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving, although it remains very variable. Fewer lessons are now inadequate as the academy has successfully addressed some of the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. Students' learning is adversely affected by changes in staffing and shortages of specialist teachers in key subjects such as English. Teachers are better at target setting and at monitoring students' progress and have a better understanding of what students should achieve. Some lessons are now more challenging, although practice is inconsistent. Teachers do not always use assessment data properly to plan lessons so, too often, students are given similar work regardless of their ability. This means that work is either too easy or too hard for some of them.

Increasingly teachers start their lessons by setting tasks clearly, which students appreciate. However, few teachers explain to students how to work effectively so as to hit their targets. As a result, students rely too much on staff for guidance and do not take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers include more paired and small-group work, and so help students engage more in lessons. This works especially well when teachers use the outcomes to generate further discussion. However, teachers do not challenge students to answer questions fully and develop their ideas. Students' weak speaking skills deter some teachers from including discussion in lessons, which denies them useful opportunities to assess students' progress and the opportunity to tackle misunderstandings.

Students are increasingly aware of their targets and progress. The academy is introducing a system to ensure targets are recorded in students' books but these arrangements are not applied consistently by all staff. Marking is now more regular and of better quality. Many teachers provide feedback, although too little refers directly to students' targets.

The academy now has better arrangements for tracking students' progress and is using this information to better target support for the many who are below age-

related expectations. This is most evident in English and mathematics and among Year 11 students, where there is the greatest legacy of underachievement, but it is also filtering down to other years. Teachers are better at assessing students' attainment accurately but it is still variable and this undermines the ability of some to plan their teaching precisely. Advanced skills teachers are making a positive impact in this area as they model higher expectations.

Provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is rightly being reorganised to focus more on educational outcomes. These plans have yet to be implemented. The impact of additional adults in lessons remains very variable because, in common with the students, these adults are not always clear about how the students should complete tasks to meet their targets.

Guidance for prospective sixth form students about course suitability is improving, as are plans for a more appropriate curriculum next academic year. Some students currently in the sixth form are not on courses which are well matched to their abilities, but their progress is being monitored more closely and they are receiving better teaching. Sixth form students' low literacy levels are still not being addressed effectively, so that many struggle with Level 3 study.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- ensure that sixth form students are guided onto appropriate courses and that their progress is closely monitored so that underperformance and loss of motivation are responded to quickly and effectively – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students mix comfortably with each other, in most cases, and feel safe. Attitudes to learning are mainly positive, with few lessons disrupted by poor behaviour, although restlessness is evident when learning lacks pace. Exclusions, which were high last year, have fallen. Students abide more closely by the academy's expectations for good behaviour. Exclusions of disabled students and those who have special educational needs remain disproportionately high. Staff are more effective at monitoring behaviour through better working in year teams. The academy is providing better support for students who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour, including more effective use of withdrawal rooms and better management of students when they return to school after exclusion. Suitable steps are being taken to improve attendance. Patterns of attendance are analysed more closely and action to tackle low attendance is better focused on those needing support. Attendance is rising among younger students, children who are looked after, and those in Year 11 and the sixth form. Nevertheless, entrenched poor attendance in other year groups is proving hard to shift and attendance is still low overall.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- take further steps to improve attendance rates, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form – satisfactory.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The capacity of leaders to move the academy forward is growing. The interim leadership team has an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders are having a positive impact on the areas that need improving and on the ability of substantive staff to lead this work. Teaching is a high priority, with a focus on recruiting high quality staff, although this is not proving easy. Academy leaders are making better use of assessment information to help improve the quality of teaching, and the monitoring of students' progress. Staff now have a better understanding about the scale of the task ahead. Assessment information is also being used to ensure that staff at all levels are more accountable for their impact on student outcomes. The monitoring of teaching, led by the interim leadership team, has been broadened to include more leaders in observing lessons and giving feedback to staff. While useful, this is not fully effective because observations do not always relate closely enough to targets set for individual staff or to academy priorities.

Strategic development plans focus on the right areas for improvement. However, they last only to the end of this academic year and do not show how progress will be secured next year, nor do they include transition arrangements for the new Principal. Currently the emphasis is on building the skills of substantive senior leaders, for example, by working alongside the interim leadership team. This remains a work in progress. The quality of subject leadership is also improving, again through work with the interim team and the advanced skills teachers. The impact is variable because subject leaders do not always provide good models of teaching. Subject development plans are emerging but embryonic. They reflect a fragile understanding in subject teams about key areas of teaching that require improvement.

The trustees have been proactive in requesting a much improved range of evidence about the academy's progress. Communications with interim and senior leaders have been sharpened so they are held increasingly to account. The progress made by students toward their targets is becoming much clearer to the trustees, who have a more realistic understanding of what the academy needs to do to achieve their challenging goals.

Progress since the last section 5:

- ensure that trustees and governors drive sustainable academy improvement – satisfactory.

External support

External support has mainly come in the form of the interim leadership team. They have made a satisfactory impact on the work of the academy and on its capacity to become a self-improving organisation. The academy has yet to complete the formal statement of action normally submitted to Ofsted following the judgement that special measures were required. This statement should be submitted within ten working days of the publication of this monitoring letter.