

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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26 November 2012

Ms C Ellins
Principal
The Marlowe Academy
Stirling Way
Ramsgate
CT12 6NB

Dear Ms Ellins

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Marlowe Academy

Following my visit with Fatiha Maitland, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 22–23 November 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 third 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 third monitoring inspection on 22–23 November 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, visited lessons and additional support work for students in withdrawal areas, and scrutinised planning, evaluation and student assessment documents. They met with senior and middle leaders, other staff and trustees, including the Chair of the Trustees. They spoke to students in meetings, at break times and in lessons, and met with a group of parents.

Context

A new Principal joined at the start of September, alongside a new sixth form leader in a Vice-Principal role, ten teaching staff and six classroom support assistants. Twenty-one teachers and nine additional classroom support staff left in August. A contract for improvement work with an education development company, mainly providing additional senior leaders, ended at the start of the term. The academy day has been shortened to finish at 3.10pm with optional activities offered up to 5pm, rather than lessons continuing to 5pm. The number of students in Year 7 is markedly below that in other years because of fewer applications for places.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Unvalidated results of this summer's Year 11 GCSE examinations and B/tec assessments show satisfactory improvement overall, with most targets hit or beaten, including in mathematics. However, results in English were below target, reflecting students' weak literacy skills. Overall, students' progress and attainment is still well below the national average. Outcomes for sixth form students were low, confirming their underachievement on often inappropriate courses. Current students of all ages are continuing the trend of previous monitoring inspections in making more progress in lessons and over time. Staff expectations are rising, including in the sixth form, where targets better reflect students' potential. Nevertheless, improvements are patchy between subjects, with slower gains in those requiring good literacy skills. When students make good progress in lessons, they clearly understand the key ideas underpinning their work. Where this is absent, learning is slow. Progress has improved most in sixth form lessons for this very reason. Sixth form students noted that being taught in small groups enables strong dialogue with staff to make sure they understand before moving on. For example, in a Year 13 physical education lesson on cricket, the teacher enabled the students to analyse their own learning and advise each other on how to improve. This is less evident in younger years and is identified by students as what they need more of in order to do well.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

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

The quality of teaching

After high turnover at the start of term, staffing is more stable. Teaching continues to improve but is inconsistent. Improving features include more engaging activities to challenge students, teachers checking progress more effectively in lessons and adapting tasks if required, and better marking. Sixth form lessons have improved most, with staff leading probing discussions to get to the heart of learning. Strong lessons are distinguished by students' active engagement rather than passive reception of teaching. Too many staff are still not doing enough to boost students' literacy skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. For example, questioning is too often superficial and students' weak writing means notes lack detail.

Professional development is making a positive impact on teaching. Increasing partnership work with staff from other schools, together with senior leaders' coaching, is giving teachers better awareness of the features of good teaching. They are enjoying using strategies such as group work with pupils and, crucially, are starting to think more about how to support learning rather than deliver teaching. However, academy expectations, for example in marking or informing students of their targets, are not consistently adhered to. While marking has improved, some staff still do not insist that students act on it, or link their comments back to students' targets so that they can see when they are succeeding or still have more to do.

Checking students' progress over time is improving. More in-year examinations are helping to measure students' attainment, avoid unexpected outcomes such as those in English in the summer, and give students valuable experience of examination conditions. The school has an accurate awareness of the students needing extra support. It is balancing well the most urgent cases in deploying resources. For example, 54 Year 11 students were away at the time of this visit at a residential centre to work on their English. Additional literacy support sessions have been broadened to include many more students. A reorganisation of special educational needs provision has the potential to promote better student achievement. Its aim is to increase the focus of the withdrawal centres on teaching alongside the well-established strengths in the quality of care. It is too early to judge the impact of this.

Good steps have been taken to adjust sixth form students' curriculum choices. All are now taking a more challenging range of subjects. Students and their parents report a purposeful start to the year. Students' progress and attendance is much more closely monitored so as to provide better guidance where needed. Support for students in making applications for study after the sixth form is also improving, with good plans for enhancing advice for would-be university entrants.

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' behaviour remains positive in most lessons and around the academy. The academy's expectations of behaviour have risen, and falling numbers of exclusions show that most students are responding well. Sixth formers now present a more positive image to younger students. They are well turned out for learning, keen to talk about the improvements in what is expected of them but know that they and the staff have more to do if they are to achieve their potential.

While lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour, the academy's challenge is that students are not fully engaged in learning either. Where ideas are difficult or the pace slows, students tend to wait to be helped rather than think for themselves. This is less the case in the sixth form because staff clarify with students that, as was said in a Year 12 drama lesson, 'I can help you but you have got to do this yourselves.'

Due to hard work by staff and a largely positive approach from students, attendance has risen further, with fewer students being regularly absent. Students know the sanctions for poor attendance and most know that attending well helps achievement in the long run. Some opportunities are missed by the academy to encourage good attendance through shorter-term rewards as well.

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 school

The Principal is getting to grips well with the academy. She brings much relevant experience of school improvement and knows that quick fixes will not ensure sustainable gains. Having worked with external support last year, the rest of the senior team are becoming more independent in their roles. Their accountability for impact on student outcomes and teaching is growing. Sixth form leadership has taken a marked step forward with the new Vice-Principal setting high expectations and using his previous experience of sixth form leadership effectively. Line management arrangements for subjects continue to improve, with subject leaders moving on in monitoring and developing their areas. This is work in progress and

students' classroom experiences still see too little consistency, including in key areas such as English.

Good progress has been made in encouraging staff to be active in their own development. Individual training folders help them and their managers see the progress made and the next steps. The Principal shows clear determination to improve teaching, tackle weak practice and recruit strong staff. She is pushing hard to form partnerships with best practice and training programmes in other schools, and these are bringing benefits in teaching and leadership.

Logical steps to improve important areas such as teaching underpin leaders' development plans and build on the work of the external consultants. However, there are too few measurable milestones to check the progress being made over time; a deficiency leaders are working swiftly to address. The trustees are also very alive to this, having gathered much more evidence last year to hold staff to account, but acutely aware that, in English, their checks still needed to be better.

Curriculum adjustments this year have given students in Years 7 to 11, and in the sixth form, more suitable 'pathways' of study linked to their attainment. Leaders know literacy provision is a fundamental area and have sensibly appointed a new member of staff from January 2013 to urgently boost literacy support across the academy.

The Principal is well aware of the challenge of reduced pupil numbers in Year 7. The budget is balanced for this year and initial planning under way should the incoming Year 7 in September 2013 also be low in number.

Progress since the last section 5:

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

External support

External support in the form of the education development company made a satisfactory impact. The partnerships developing this term, notably with other schools, are helping to develop the academy's capacity for sustained improvement but the full impact has yet to be seen.