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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 Christopher Cheswright and Hermione Horn, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 20–21 March 2013, 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 fourth 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 other's 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 20–21 March 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, and visited lessons and additional support sessions, including in specialist support centres. They scrutinised planning and evaluation documents and met with senior and middle leaders, other staff and trustees, including the Chair of the Trustees. They spoke to students in meetings and around the academy at the start of the day and during breaks.

Context

Thirteen staff, some on temporary contracts, left at the end of the autumn term. Six new teachers joined, one of whom took over the leadership of English at half-term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' progress continues to improve steadily, and most report being more positive about what they can achieve because teaching is getting better. More students are on track to meet challenging targets in key subjects such as English, and in the sixth form. The previously wide gaps in attainment between those known to be eligible for free school meals and others are closing quickly. Nevertheless, these improvements have not yet overcome past underachievement, including for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The weak literacy skills of many students continue to slow their progress in lessons, for example making it difficult for them to talk about their ideas or write notes from discussions. And too many still lack the confidence to learn independently, tending to wait for teachers to tell them how to move on. Better specialist support in the AIM centre is helping older students who have behavioural difficulties to make more progress, although the younger students do not have access to this support so their progress is not accelerating quickly enough.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved further. Staff turnover remains high, including in English, mathematics and science, but is settling with mainly more effective staff being recruited. Teachers ensure that more lessons include: activities which capture students' attention; clear learning objectives; work which challenges students of differing ability; checks on students' progress such as through questioning; and tasks

to develop speaking, listening, reading and writing. However, too many lessons still lack these features. Too often teachers focus on 'delivering' content, rather than ensuring students are active learners who leave the room with more knowledge and/or skills than they arrived with.

Teachers' marking has improved, with better feedback on the strengths in students' work and clear identification of areas for improvement. Older students find the new tracking sheets really helpful. In English, for example, they show students how to improve to hit their grades. However, marking is not consistently effective. Some staff miss opportunities to ensure students refer to marking, and to link it to their targets. Homework is being set more regularly, but staff expectations are not consistently high enough to ensure it is regularly completed and always useful.

Additional help and guidance for students is increasingly effective, such as coaching sessions to help Year 11 students prepare for controlled assessments, or computer-based literacy support for students who have low reading ages. Reorganised teaching and support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is increasing the impact of the specialist centres and the inclusion of students in mainstream lessons. Their progress is monitored more closely and action is swifter if there are concerns. The academy is improving staff skills in supporting these students in lessons and to ensure that when students are in the specialist centres, their work links to the curriculum. However, this is work in progress and the academy is rightly reviewing the further training and development needed to ensure these students' progress accelerates faster.

Improvements in the sixth form have continued to accelerate and build on the good gains seen in the last monitoring visit. Strong leadership has resulted in further developments in the academic and pastoral monitoring of students' progress. Staff keep regular checks on students' attendance and work rate, and the progress they are making towards their targets. Advice and guidance for those thinking of joining the sixth form, and about life after the sixth form for those leaving, are accurate. Students attending Year 11 in other schools are beginning to apply for places, reflecting the improving quality of their education and the courses on offer.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- 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 – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Staff are doing the right things to improve attendance, which is rising but remains below average. Reduced local authority support has presented staff with a challenge in working with persistently absent students and their families. They are responding positively, including through outreach work, and the number of students regularly

missing school is falling. More rewards for good attendance are also encouraging students to come in.

The academy community is increasingly harmonious and students say behaviour is improving. A minority of students still behave inappropriately at times, but the reducing number of exclusions reflects well on what the academy is doing to support students who find it difficult to manage their behaviour. Staff who support students who display the most challenging behaviour are making an increasing impact. A small number of younger students who are not getting this level of support disrupt some lessons and break times.

Students are being encouraged to take on a wider range of roles in the academy. Taking a lead from the work of sixth formers, the Junior Leaders are beginning to provide feedback about how they think their learning can be improved.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- 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 capacity of senior leaders to improve the academy is building securely. While leaders are making much use of external partners to improve teaching, they are now leading the decision-making about the focus of these partnerships and how their impact is checked. The senior team is strongly determined to ensure that all students achieve well, and staff increasingly share that view. Sixth form leadership remains good. Subject leaders are making more impact on teaching in their areas of responsibility as they become more established in their roles, although they still depend on support from senior leaders. The recent change in English leadership has brought fresh impetus.

The Principal works hard to recruit effective teachers and has high expectations. Staff development focuses well on teaching through observation, feedback to teachers and development activities, including for newly qualified staff. Inadequate teaching has largely been tackled. However, lesson monitoring does not focus enough on whether all students are making good progress, ensuring staff know how to check all students are learning at a fast pace, and what to do if they are not. A potentially useful plan has recently been drawn up to improve support for literacy in all subjects, but it has yet to be implemented.

The trustees are sharpening further their monitoring of the academy's progress. Clearer milestones in strategic plans make it easier to do this. But they recognise the need for independent expertise in checking students' progress toward targets, and what they are being told by leaders about the quality of teaching. To this end they are rightly appointing an auditor with educational expertise, and have appointed four

new members to the board of trustees with skills relevant to their role in supporting senior leaders while holding them to account. The trustees are working effectively with the Principal to manage a deficit budget, based on expected student numbers being low in September.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

Useful partnerships with a range of other schools are bringing improvement. They have allowed staff to visit other schools to see good practice in the classroom, and supported aspects of leadership such as managing teachers' performance and developing the role of subject leaders. A recent agreement with another academy sponsor is intended to add a further element of partnership working but has yet to be implemented.