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3 July 2013

Mr David Day  
The Isle of Sheppey Academy  
Head Office East Site Minster Road  
Minster-on-Sea  
ME12 3JQ

Dear Mr Day

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Isle of Sheppey Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I had discussions with you and six other members of the strategic leadership team at different times. I also talked to your Assistant Principal with responsibility for students with special educational needs and the Head of Sixth Form. In these meetings we focussed on attainment and progress, the quality of teaching, the provision for children with special educational needs, attendance and behaviour and the work of the academy in engaging with parents. I met with the chair of the Governing Body who is a representative of the primary sponsor of the academy, Dulwich College, and another governor and I spoke with a representative from the Department for Education.

I evaluated the academy's documents, including the improvement planning documents and data about the students' academic progress and attendance. I considered documents demonstrating the impact of the academy's monitoring of attendance, behaviour and the quality of teaching.

I toured both academy sites: the East site with you and your Strategic Leader of Teaching and Learning, and the West site with one of your executive headteachers.

On these tours we briefly observed lessons taking place. I also spoke to students about their learning and their work and looked at their books.

After school, I attended a learning activity where different teams of teachers presented their research on teaching and learning to other teachers.

## **Context**

You are the Principal of a split site academy which moved into new buildings on both sites in February 2013. The academy was founded in 2009 and Dulwich College is the principal sponsor, while Kent Local Authority and the Diocese of Canterbury are co-sponsors. This is about to change, as it is planned that Oasis Community Learning will take on a sole sponsor role from January 2014. Dulwich College will retain some connections with the academy as an educational partner.

At the moment each of the two sites has an executive headteacher. As part of a review of the leadership structure, these posts will no longer exist in September 2013, and it is not yet clear how the new leadership team will be structured. In addition around seven teachers will be leaving the school and you have been successful in recruiting five teachers to replace them from the Teach First programme and several NQTs whom you feel show promise.

## **Main findings**

Although the academy has continued to improve since the section 5 which judged it to require improvement in March, there is still a considerable distance to travel before it will provide a good education.

At the moment many senior leaders are working to good effect on different areas of the school's work but they are doing so in isolation. You have not created a strong team working to shared priorities. It is important that the senior team share a unified vision, and an understanding of how their work fits together. This will help them support and challenge each other with greater impact.

There is considerable enthusiasm for the business of teaching in the academy. The Strategic Leader of Teaching and Learning has put in place a range of tailor-made activities to support teachers in adjusting to the new open plan learning spaces and to improve their practice. The quality of individual teachers' teaching and the extent to which each are promoting their students' progress is carefully monitored. The evidence that this is an improving picture is very credible. The strategic leader has an accurate understanding of what needs to be done. You are aware that some departments are further ahead than others and while the continuous professional development offered by the academy is high quality, you are rightly seeking to recruit strong teachers to weaker departments.

The attainment of your students has improved year on year but it is not yet good. Your Strategic Leader of Attainment acknowledges that because many of the students who start at the academy in Year 7 have already fallen way behind in their learning, the academy must work to ensure that most students make four levels of progress between Year 7 and the end of Year 11. Sixth formers are doing very well on vocational and some academic courses, but less well at A S level. Your Head of Sixth Form has ensured that the academy offers an appropriate range of courses, and that the admission requirements to courses reflect what students need to have achieved if they are to be successful in the sixth form.

At the moment students are still not making enough progress in English and mathematics. These subjects are critical to their long-term success. We discussed the importance of ensuring that all subject teachers strongly support the development of literacy skills and the understanding of mathematical concepts in all lessons.

We also confirmed the importance of improving the rates of progress made in these areas of learning and of ensuring that students in Year 7 and Key Stage 3 are helped to catch up on core skills as fast as possible. The academy is rightly beginning to focus more strongly on ensuring that these early year groups get off to a flying start.

I agreed with your Assistant Principal with responsibility for students with special educational needs that some of those identified with special needs will have simply fallen behind, and am pleased to hear that many students are being reassessed and removed from special needs register.

The attendance of students, including sixth formers, has improved and a great many strategies have been put in place to effect this improvement. However it is not good enough yet and it fluctuates too much. The Executive Head who leads on this area, together with the Strategic Leader of Community and Vocational education recognise that the academy has to establish attendance as a 'given' and to gain the commitment of all students' parents to this. Reducing the number of fixed term exclusions will help. These leaders are rightly initiating a large number of activities designed to raise the profile of the academy in the community.

Students on the East site have responded well to improvements in teaching. They express the view that they are learning well. They know their targets and are able to talk about the next steps they need to take. They appeared proud of their achievements. On this site all the students were observed to be working hard in their lessons. Students were less well engaged in their learning and make less good progress on the West site.

The school still excludes students far too often. The Strategic Leader of Behaviour has managed to bring the number of exclusions down and continues to work to ensure that students and staff share expectations of behaviour and that staff are consistent in the way they respond to misbehaviour and defiance. This is an

important area of the work of the academy that must be owned by every leader at every level.

You, together with your strategic leaders, have not yet ensured that all middle managers are working effectively with you to drive improvements in the school. Not all members of this group are given sufficient opportunity to lead their areas of responsibility and deliver your policies and none are yet properly held to account for this important part of their work. Because of this, important messages are not being followed up as well as they should be. Also, you are missing the input and expertise of an important group of individuals. In addition, too much of the work that some strategic leaders are doing is operational rather than strategic.

Sharing the vision for improvement and engaging all staff, students and parents in driving these improvements have become critical issues for the academy.

Governors have an acute insight into the workings of the academy. They hold leaders to account appropriately by monitoring performance data. They rightly identified the need for faster improvement and appropriately negotiated for an academy chain with a successful track record in improvement to take responsibility for this academy. They have begun to rationalise the leadership structure.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- further review the leadership structure of the school to ensure
  - that senior strategic leaders become a team that shares both a vision and responsibility for the priorities of the academy and delegates with accountability
  - that all middle leaders are fully delivering on the improvement agenda by setting expectations of their teachers and students and holding each accountable
- improve the progress made in mathematics and literacy in Key Stage 3, particularly in respect of students of all abilities who arrive at the school behind in their learning
- take bold action to reduce fixed term exclusion, increase attendance and continue to improve behaviour in the long term by raising the expectations in these areas and ensuring consistent responses to students in respect of these issues.

Ofsted will carry out further visits and will provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

The primary sponsor, Dulwich College, rightly recognised that it does not have the capacity to drive improvements at the rate required. The college has however, supported teachers' development and has offered effective support in improving the attainment and aspirations of the most able students at the academy. Through their representative on the Governing Body, they have offered support and challenge to leaders, particularly in respect of marketing and staffing, and have brokered the arrangements with Oasis Community Learning.

It is recommended that representatives from Oasis Community Learning are involved with the development of the academy and its vision as soon as possible and that plans are drawn up swiftly to ensure a smooth transition between sponsors.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent, the Diocese of Canterbury and the education funding agency.

Yours sincerely

Emma Ing  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**