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Cassie Ellins
Principal
The Marlowe Academy
Stirling Way
CT12 6NB

Dear Ms Ellins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Marlowe Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 15 October 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

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

Senior leaders, governors and sponsors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- complete the process of consultation on all of your key strategies, and launch the development plan as a document to steer work over the next few years
- continually emphasise the importance of a high proportion of students achieving better than what is regarded nationally as 'expected progress' by the time they reach the end of Year 11, so that their examination results are a truer reflection of their abilities than their end of Key Stage 2 results were
- continue to develop middle leaders' capacity to steer improvements in teaching and learning strongly and confidently
- maintain specialist input to the new Year 7 curriculum in English and mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and your senior team, students who serve on the student improvement board (SIB), a representative of the governing body, and a representative of the main sponsor, Roger De Haan, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. The academy improvement plan was evaluated.

Main findings

Your passion and commitment to achieve the very best for all of the students in this academy is apparent. You and your senior team are making a big difference to these children's lives, and to their life-chances. The challenges here are considerable, but strategies are being found to overcome difficulties and to bring stability and social cohesion to an academy which has had a turbulent past.

You believe strongly that an action plan should be refined and improved by obtaining the contributions of everyone involved in bringing about change. As a consequence, there are gaps in the current working model which you agree will be completed by November. Its structure and approach are good; it includes clear statements about the difference that the actions to be taken will make, although several are still generic and could be usefully adapted to suit the academy's particular ambitions for the next few years.

Achievement in the sixth form in the summer 2013 examinations was even better than in 2012, and some key indicators of performance are now above national averages. There is a clear curriculum structure in place that offers appropriate pathways for all students, and ensures that the qualifications and experiences offered will enable them all to progress to university, further vocational training and employment.

Examination results for Year 11 in 2013 showed improvement in some key measures, with 7% more obtaining five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics, compared to the previous year. The proportion of students making the progress expected of them in English rose significantly but is still, as it is in mathematics, below national levels. The proportion obtaining at least a C grade in English increased, because of their better progress, but many fewer achieved grade C or better in English or in mathematics, than the national average. We agreed that students' very low Key Stage 2 scores reflected their potential to some extent, but were also a consequence of previous underperformance. Your targets must therefore have an appropriate emphasis on students making better than national expected levels of progress, to ensure that their attainment by age 16 improves dramatically from its low levels on entry to the academy.

The quality of teaching in the academy is improving. This is because training is intensive and is well-targeted to meet individuals' needs. You and your senior team

are carefully developing middle leaders, to bring them to the point where they play a full and active part in driving up achievement. As a result they are gaining in confidence and becoming very responsive to the higher levels of accountability you are introducing.

Very low levels of literacy are currently a major barrier to better achievement. The academy is tackling this energetically, and with a range of responses aimed at making a difference in the short and medium term. There is evidence of some big gains in reading ages currently. The new Year 7 curriculum is designed to support literacy and numeracy development and, at the same time, provide ways of meeting students' social and broader learning needs. You are conscious of the need to balance the necessary specialist input, particularly in English and mathematics, with having a small number of class teachers. Other significant changes in the academy include the introduction of a personal, social and health education course, and a greater emphasis on the social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects of each subject.

Overall trends in students' attendance are positive, with a continuation in the significant improvement seen over 2012/13. The number of exclusions also decreased from the very high 2011/12 levels and this trend is also continuing. This is because of the improving behaviour generally in the academy, due to the better teaching, and the good work of the Aim Centre. Student services are now becoming very well coordinated and the new ways of monitoring the achievement of students who benefit from these extra support systems can help to accelerate the progress they make.

Students are beginning to have genuine and exciting ways of contributing to the development of the academy. There is a new prefect system in place involving sixth form students, and a new head boy and head girl. The academy is establishing a student improvement board (SIB) which consists of selected members of Year 8-11 who work with individual trustees on issues of considerable strategic importance. All of this has can involve students in making a real difference.

The academy and its governors are taking an appropriately assertive response to the need to drive up the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium. The termly meeting of the governors' standards committee includes scrutiny of the impact of this funding, and of the Year 7 catch-up premium.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is a sponsor but, until recently, has had little to do with the academy's work. Over the last year discussions and conversations between you and the local authority have begun to identify opportunities for a much closer working relationship. For example, a local authority officer is currently working with you to

identify intervention strategies with current Year 11 students to boost their progress over the time that remains before their GCSE examinations next year.

The sponsor, Roger De Haan, offers considerable support for the academy through the work of his education officer and through the trustees, a group of people who possess between them considerable skills and experience, and who hold the academy closely to account for improvements in standards. The Innovation Centre works closely with the academy and these links benefit many of your students.

The academy has a range of other links with other schools locally. You have established good relationships with other schools in Thanet and with the academy chain that sponsors a number of primary schools locally. You orchestrate this support very effectively to bring good practice into the academy and to enable it to measure itself against good and outstanding practice elsewhere.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent, the Education Funding Agency and the Academies Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector