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Mr Ian Johnson  
The Principal  
The Marlowe Academy  
Stirling Way  
Ramsgate  
Kent  
CT12 6NB

Dear Mr Johnson

Academies Initiative: Monitoring Visit to The Marlowe Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Cathie Munt HMI to your academy on 6 and 7 June 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring visit in connection with the academies initiative.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the principal, team leaders, the chair of the governing body and sponsor, groups of students and parents.

Context

The Marlowe Academy opened in September 2005 in the former building of The Ramsgate School. The academy transferred to the new build, a striking modern-day design, in 2006 when the building was completed. The academy opened with 50% of the original staff, all of the students, and a new principal and leadership team. It has dual specialism in performing arts and in business enterprise.

The academy is smaller than most secondary schools. The number of students on roll increased notably in the academy's second year and currently stands at 673, including 85 in the sixth form. The number on roll is expected to rise to around 800

students at the start of the next academic year. When full, the academy will have over 1100 students on roll, including over 250 in the sixth form.

The academy draws its students from some of the most socially and economically deprived wards in Kent. The majority of the students are White, mainly British, backgrounds, with other groups of Slovakian, Czech Roma, Polish and Turkish descent. A very small minority come from a diverse range of other ethnic and cultural traditions. The percentage of students speaking a language other than English is in line with the national average. A significant number of the students from eastern Europe, when admitted, are at the very early stages of learning basic English. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is well above average. Over 54% of the total intake has a learning difficulty or disability, including 3% who have a statement of special educational need. Special arrangements with the local authority led to the academy accepting over 100 students in Years 8 to 11 who had been out of school for up to a year. The academy also has a small minority of students who are either looked after or are new to the country.

There have been important changes in staffing in the first two years of the academy opening. The foremost change has taken place amongst the senior leadership team, which includes the appointment of nine senior team leaders with subject leadership responsibilities across the academy and reporting directly to the principal. A new sixth form was established in 2005. This has expanded within a short time and over 150 students are expected to be in Years 12 and 13 next academic year.

### Achievement and standards

There is a clear trend of improvement in results in national tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11. Standards of attainment on entry show marginal improvements each year but assessment information shows that two thirds or more of the students in all year groups, especially in Years 10 and 11, enter the academy with well below average levels of attainment, particularly in literacy. The academy builds on this undeveloped foundation enabling students to make more rapid progress in Years 10 and 11 as their literacy skills and independent learning improve. Results in the 2006 GCSE examinations, although well below national average standards, were significantly higher than that achieved in the predecessor school and also much higher than expected given students' starting points, with 29% of Year 11 students gaining five or more A\* to C grades. However, the proportion of students gaining at least five or at least one A\* to G grades fell short of expectations, as did the percentage gaining at least five A\* to C grades with English and mathematics. The national test results taken by Year 9 students improved significantly in English but were slightly below the previous year's results in mathematics and science. These results were low in comparison with national averages.

Whereas in 2006, most sixth form students achieved a merit or pass in the vocational courses, the 2007 results are expected to be significantly better with well over half of the students being on course to gain a distinction or merit. Students' performance is particularly strong in health and social care, information and communication technology (ICT), performing arts and sports. Students' progress accelerates further

throughout their study and many students make up ground as they develop stronger independent study skills.

The academy's predictions of students gaining higher grades in 2007 are confirmed by the wide-ranging assessment data on students' past and current progress, their mock examination and actual modular results.

The academy has rightly identified a wide range of key strategies to raise attainment and improve the aspirations and enthusiasm of students towards their education. The extended school day, with its carefully orchestrated study group for each year group, ensures that every student receives exceptionally good support. This compulsory provision provides the students with opportunities to receive individual, group and whole class tuition, mentoring and specialist support. The arrangement gives them access to ICT facilities and other resources to assist them with their studies. The close supervision enables the students to complete their homework and keep up to speed with the work within the school working hours. The focus on using the accelerated reading strategy to improve students' literacy skills is highly effective. Most students have very low reading ages, often up to four years or more behind their chronological ages. Test results show good, and sometimes exceptional, gains in the reading ages of these students within a short time.

The sustained progress in raising standards and achievement is also strengthened by the academy's use of its specialisms, performing arts and business and enterprise, to increase students' social skills, in particular their confidence and motivation. The students are responding well to the opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. Students spoke positively about the planned activities and the way in which they are contributing to them enjoying learning and becoming serious students. For example, the academy is successfully raising students' aspiration and has demonstrated that social circumstances are not an excuse for low ambition. The first cohort of some Year 13 students will be moving on to higher education at the start of the new academic year.

### Personal development and well-being

Personal development is good. Students are friendly and their behaviour in and around the site is generally good. In lessons seen, most displayed good attitudes and enjoyed their learning and were keen to achieve well. They respond well to each other and their teachers and show respect when spoken to about their work.

The academy's specialisms in performing arts and business enterprise have had a discernible influence on developing the students' self esteem and raising achievement. The quality of the environment and the excellently planned use of space combine to provide the students with many opportunities in the day to socialise and converse with the staff in a businesslike, yet friendly, manner.

The academy provides good opportunities for ensuring students develop a good understanding of the world of work through using business and enterprise to increase their financial awareness and use of the media as a marketing tool.

Similarly, the performing arts are used very well to increase the students' self-esteem and ability to articulate their views. Consequently, Year 12 and 13 students say that the academy has boosted their independent working skills and inspired them to become confident individuals able to represent themselves.

The academy has good procedures to safeguard the well-being and safety of students and actively uses courses such as personal and social health, sports education and food technology to reinforce the importance of healthy lifestyles. The rate of exclusion is relatively high but is rightly linked to the academy's stringent approach to eradicating smoking. The rigorous approach has led to a significant increase in students giving up this habit.

Attendance is improving but remains below the average for secondary schools. There are robust and effective procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality; but a minority of students, especially in Years 10 and 11, who are known school refusers, affect the overall rates of attendance.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is good. A quarter of the lessons observed were satisfactory and the majority of the remainder were good. Teachers are consistent in their efforts to raise attainment and to motivate students. They know their students well and the mutual respect evident between adults and students helped lessons to proceed calmly and efficiently. The academy's policy that teaching should always be non-confrontational in order to defuse potentially difficult situations was evident in the lessons observed. In one unsatisfactory lesson, the poor attitudes and behaviour of a small group of students prevented the class from making reasonable progress although the teacher successfully contained their, at times, unacceptable behaviour. This highlighted the significant progress that the academy has made as the majority of students are now well behaved and cooperative.

In the good lessons, work moved at a brisk pace and the staff and students had high expectations of what could be achieved; learning objectives were appropriate; and well planned tasks supported the intended outcomes effectively. In many lessons the work was planned at different levels enabling all students to work at an appropriate level of difficulty. Teachers used effective strategies to engage students' attention and there was excellent support from teachers and support staff for those with language or other learning difficulties. Health and safety issues were to the fore in practical subjects and students responded well to expectations that they would behave responsibly. In some lessons teachers referred to national criteria and students used these to assess their own work. Students valued the praise that they received as it was rightly earned for genuine effort and achievement.

Teachers found many opportunities in lessons to provide helpful feedback to students and this encouraged the less secure students to redouble their efforts and challenged the more able individuals. Marking seen was of a high quality and gave students precise information about what to do next in order to achieve higher

standards. Assessment information is used well and provides students and parents with useful information about students' progress.

The rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning by senior leaders has enabled the academy to have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching. This information has been used to determine whole-school, departmental and individual training needs and effective programmes have been implemented that have raised performance overall and increased the consistency of practice.

The quality of learning matched the quality of teaching exactly. Consequently in the majority of lessons, students made good progress in their learning and many were keen to let the inspectors know how much they enjoyed their lessons. Students say that they thrive well because their teachers treat them with respect and as individuals. The extended day allows students to study subjects over greater periods of time, thus increasing the opportunity to follow theory lessons immediately with practical activities. Students quickly become used to longer hours on site and see this as a useful preparation for work. The academy is sensitive and most responsive to the needs of the students and, as one younger student told an inspector, 'They don't fit squares into round holes here!'

The curriculum is appropriately seen as a key feature to raise attainment and to foster students' desire to learn. The academy constantly reviews the curriculum and, in so doing, ensures that it meets students' needs very well. It has therefore been very quick to respond to finding ways to improve students' basic skills in order to motivate them. Systematic provision in basic literacy and numeracy skills for low attaining students in Years 7 and 8 has paid handsome dividends and by developing these skills students are in a better position to access the entire curriculum. Further work is planned to introduce more intensive basic skills programme in these and other year groups next academic year.

The academy's pioneering approach to implementing the two hour long teaching sessions, with a mixture of short breaks and study hours, has improved continuity in learning and given students the opportunity to take more responsibility for their learning. The academy has introduced a diverse curriculum at Key Stage 4 which reflects the profile and needs of the students. A good combination of academic and vocational courses provides clear progression routes for students entering the sixth form. The 14 to 19 curriculum is therefore flexible and well planned to provide students with a much broader range of vocational courses and an increasing number of GCSE and AS level and A level courses as the roll increases. The curriculum is enhanced by the increasing use of personalised learning programmes for students with specific learning needs. For example, more able students in Years 7 to 9 are given the opportunity to take early GCSE examinations in English, mathematics and science and the performing arts. Students new to the country and at the early stage of acquiring English as a second language can gain qualifications in good range of courses. The academy also promotes the linguistic heritage of students by enabling them to take GCSE examinations in their first language.

Students benefit from the good quality care and guidance provided. The academy works successfully with a range of local and national services and providers including the universities of Christ Church and Kent, the police, educational psychologists, youth and community youth worker and counselling services such as Breakthrough. These outside bodies add to the comprehensive and rigorous provision provided by the support and guidance team. The range of expertise within the academy ensures that the needs of students are identified clearly and that intervention is swift.

### Leadership and management

The academy is very well led by an experienced principal. Within 18 months of opening, the new principal, fully supported by the governing body, has created a new learning environment in which the whole academy is constantly focused on identifying, planning and using a wide range of strategies to raise achievement and standards further. The principal leads the transformation very well, putting into place well thought out structures that are leading to the academy pursuing its priority for raising students' academic standards. Parents spoke highly about the academy's work with their children and believe that it 'fits in around their children and meets their needs', boosted their confidence, introduced a 'can do culture' and increased their life chances.

The principal has the able support of the team leaders. He has created a simple, yet effective leadership and management structure for the senior team. The structure ensures that each leader takes full responsibility for an area of the academy with support from others also with responsibility. This ensures the academy runs smoothly. The team leaders have taken appropriate steps to ensure that every member of staff within their respective area can guarantee that every student makes reasonably good progress. The team work is good and, together, the team members have maintained the momentum of improving standards, primarily as they share the principal's passion for transforming the school. Together they have balanced the demands of setting up a new school and driving up standards against a backdrop of low aspirations and low standards on entry. The leadership team is effective because of the rigorous way in which it monitors and evaluates the quality of provision and identifies the next steps needed. Senior leaders share ideas, support each other and new staff and spread the benefits of their training widely.

The comprehensive approach to monitoring provision is exemplified in the extensive use of assessment to monitor students' progress and identify how best to support their learning. Senior leaders constantly challenge staff, as the drive to raise standards is unrelenting. The academy's self-evaluation of its work is accurate and it is well placed to sustain the improvements because the senior team and governors have gained the support and loyalty of the staff who understand their obsession for driving standards further.

The governors know the academy very well. They monitor the quality of provision and ask searching questions in their pursuit of holding the academy to account in relation to students' academic and social achievements. They make very good use of

their experience to widen students' experience of the world of work and higher education.

### External support

The very good quality collaborative work with other local schools, universities, the local authority services, businesses and organisations is a strength of the academy's work. For instance, close links with local primary schools have identified how teachers can share good practice to accelerate students' basic skills before they transfer to secondary school. Transition to the academy is therefore carried out with relative ease because various projects, involving Year 6 students and their parents, have been well developed and well received by parents. Extensive partnership work with local universities has resulted in students developing an increasing awareness of the benefits of higher education. Additionally, the Excellence in Cities initiative is leading to the academy being well prepared to offer a broader curriculum, in particular, the 14 to 19 diplomas next academic year.

### Main judgement

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Maintain the focus on improving attendance and punctuality.
- Persist in developing a culture of high expectations in relation to students' academic achievement and progress, so that all can reach higher levels of attainment.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Group at the DfES.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney  
HM Inspector of Schools