

6 May 2009

Mr I Johnson
The Headteacher
The Marlowe Academy
Stirling Way
Ramsgate
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CT12 6NB

Dear Mr Johnson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 28 April 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would also like to offer my appreciation for the cooperation of the chair of governors and to those students I spoke to both in interviews and lessons.

Since the last inspection in March 2008, the academy's leadership team has been restructured. New senior leaders with responsibility for English, mathematics, science and creative arts have been appointed along with a senior leader with overall responsibility for performance. A National Challenge Adviser was appointed to work with the academy in September 2008.

As a result of the inspection on 27 and 28 March 2008, the academy was asked to:

- raise achievement and standards by monitoring teaching more rigorously to ensure it focuses on how well students learn and is consistently good
- develop an effective whole school approach to improving students' literacy and numeracy skills
- improve students' attendance.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

In 2008, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C improved significantly to 52%. Although still below the national average, this exceeded the academy's target. However, the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C including both English and mathematics, although almost double that of the previous year, did not meet the academy's target. Currently, standards at GCSE in English and mathematics remain exceptionally low.

Tracking data and assessments already completed indicate that the trends in improvement at GCSE evident over the last three years are set to continue. Given the students very low attainment on entry, the GCSE results in 2008 placed the academy in the top 5% of schools for the progress students made when measured against their starting points. In Year 9, the targets set for students to make two National Curriculum levels of progress in 2009 are likely to be met in mathematics and exceeded considerably in English. Both will be a significant improvement on the previous year.

The academy has taken robust action to improve students' performance in English and mathematics and their key skills of literacy and numeracy. Since the last inspection, a new senior leader has been appointed in each subject with a clear responsibility for driving up standards. Action has been taken to provide more dedicated teaching time, particularly in Years 7 and 8, and the curriculum is being reviewed to include a greater emphasis on functional skills and 'mental maths'. Students in Years 7 to 9 are now grouped by ability allowing teachers to tailor their lessons more effectively to meet the needs of the students. Literacy and numeracy now have a much higher profile across all subjects and staff professional development has focused on developing these key skills. One outcome of this can be seen in teachers' planning which makes good reference to how lessons contribute to developing students' literacy and numeracy. Many of the initiatives however have only recently been implemented and so it is too early to judge their impact on students' performance.

The monitoring of teaching and learning has become more rigorous. There are now three points each year where all staff are observed teaching, and issues arising from observations are followed through in the next cycle. This has given senior leaders a much clearer picture of the quality of teaching and there is a steady improvement in the proportion of lessons judged to be good, although this has yet to reach the academy's challenging target. Intervention and support for staff are in place and good use is being made of specific staff to coach their peers. The judgements made on the quality of lessons observed during the visit matched those of the academy. Lesson planning is of good quality with assessment data being used well to inform learning outcomes. Whole-class teaching is effective with teachers engaging the students through targeted, open questions and interesting demonstrations. Relationships are a strength; students are keen to learn and demonstrated good behaviour. Lessons where students are taught in single-sex groups are effective, with groupwork and information and communication technology being used particularly well in one to promote good learning. Students spoke of lessons now being more engaging and felt they were actively involved in their learning.

The academy has implemented a new attendance and punctuality policy that makes very clear the responsibilities of all staff and the expectations of students and parents. This policy is accessible to parents through its website. A much greater emphasis has been placed on improving attendance and the robust systems in place at the last inspection for monitoring attendance continue to be implemented well. There is now a more sophisticated use of data that enables individual students'

patterns of attendance to be tracked more closely, so supporting early intervention. Attendance competitions and the system for rewarding high levels of attendance are appreciated by most students. As a result of the actions taken, attendance in this current year, although still well below the national average overall, is just over 90%, an improvement on the previous year. Attendance remains lowest in Years 10 and 11 where it is still below 90%, but is now around the national average in Years 7 and 8. The number of persistent absentees remains high and above the average for academies but has fallen by just over a fifth in comparison to the previous year.

The restructured senior leadership team is working very effectively to drive forward the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection and its own development plan. Senior leaders and trustees know that, although there have been some notable successes to date, there are still considerable challenges ahead and they are committed to providing a high quality education for all Marlowe students.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dowgill
Additional Inspector