



The Marlowe Academy

Case study



Raising aspirations

The Marlowe Academy opened in 2005 in the building of the failing predecessor school (Ramsgate) before moving to striking new purpose-built accommodation in 2006. Sponsored by Roger De Haan, former chairman of Saga Holidays, and Kent County Council, it draws its students from some of the most socially and economically deprived areas in Kent. The majority of the students are white, mainly British backgrounds, with other groups of Slovakian, Czech Roma, Polish and Turkish descent.

The Academy specialises in performing arts and business enterprise. Performing arts was selected as a way of bringing people together, to help students develop communication skills and open their eyes to a world of possibilities. Business enterprise is a specialism because business is growing in the local area, and the Academy wants its young people to be entrepreneurial. The Academy hopes the combination will complement each other well in order to raise students' confidence and aspirations.

The leadership team at the Marlowe Academy has raised attainment by combining traditional GCSEs with vocational BTEC courses.

Principal Ian Johnson says: "Up until now we haven't considered doing GCSEs other than in English, maths and science. It has all been BTEC and Diploma courses. The students focus on one main subject, whatever that may be, along with their core GCSEs in English, maths and science. So for example, a student may do eight hours of business studies a week, which is the equivalent of four GCSEs.

"We introduced more GCSEs in September 2009 so students have a choice of whether to choose a package of GCSEs or a more focused Diploma. It has enabled us to make good progress from a school where only 3-4% of students were getting five GCSEs A-C, to 53% last summer."

Weekly themes are also a distinctive feature of life at Marlowe and open up debate on a wide range of issues, including health, human rights, disability, prejudice, diversity, inclusion and tolerance to name just a few. The weekly themes are picked up on in whole school assemblies and tutorials, and provide the Academy with an opportunity to talk about a wide range of issues relevant to modern day life.

Attendance at the Marlowe Academy is at 90%, which is the highest it's ever been.

"To tackle attendance you need to create an environment that the students want to be in," says Ian Johnson. "A school that's welcoming and where they are treated with respect. The other side of it is chasing those that aren't attending to find out and address the reasons why.

"We don't run sin bins and we don't have withdrawal. Instead we have specialist teams who provide support to students who may need it. That includes an Emotional and Behaviour Disorder (EBD) team to provide support to our most challenging students, a team for kids who are on the autistic spectrum, a team for our refugee and asylum intake, and a welfare team for anyone who needs support in a crisis."

"It's about how you deal with issues when they come up," adds Liz Habbershaw, Team Leader for the Sixth Form, ICT and Vocational Courses. "Following up on poor attendance immediately is really important to us, so if a student isn't here we call their home straight away.

"Ultimately it has to be about results and we've improved them year on year, which gives the students a sense of pride and achievement. Before I think they felt there was a limit on what they could do and achieve. Our job is to show them that the only limits are just inside their heads."

"This is a buzzy, 'can-do', school which celebrates the individual and their differences," says Naomi Black, Media and Creative Arts Team Leader. "Every target that is thrown at this school, every next step, we have met. And the students have risen to each and every challenge."

"Seeing young people succeed is my motivation," says Ian Johnson. "These are families from an area that has never been well served by its schools. For me it's about seeing the first sixth form students go to university a year or so ago, followed by the next 20 this year and hopefully 40 next year. These kids are getting opportunities they would never have had or have believed in before."

The Marlowe Academy

Principal

Ian Johnson

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Doing things differently

The Academy's slogan is 'Proud to be different' and is a true reflection of the innovative measures that have been introduced since the Marlowe Academy opened.

A longer day, two-hour lessons and no homework!

There are no school bells at Marlowe. The working day is longer, starting at 8.30am and finishing at 5pm, with just short breaks between two-hour classes.

"The longer day is all about supporting youngsters who probably wouldn't do their homework," says Mr Johnson. "Kids who may not have their own computer or somebody willing or able to help or encourage them off site."

"Finishing any earlier is education by compromise. School should be a working day and that's what we've set out to create – to get students ready for the big wide world outside."

The length of lessons at Marlowe is different from many more traditional schools. They are two hours long with a ten to fifteen minute break in the middle.

Year 7 student, Ben Cannon, says: "I used to struggle with the timings at my old school and used to get bored easily, but here we have breaks at the right time and then go back to what we were doing before. Double two-hour sessions with a break in the middle are good because you have time to really get into things before changing subject. You don't even realise how long the day is, it's bizarre, half the day has already gone."

"Schools need to look at how adult life works and then help students to prepare accordingly," says Mr Johnson. "It's all about structuring ourselves in a way that will prepare students for the working world."

"One of the reasons for the longer learning slots is to encourage staff to be more creative in the way that they teach to make learning as interesting, fun and engaging as it should be."

"Students have a lot of energy and creativity here at the Marlowe Academy," says Bruce Healy, Lead Art Teacher. "Because we have a flexible day, we get to do lots more things than other schools and colleges. We get to do lots of innovative projects which take us outside of the Academy itself."

Every student at Marlowe has study time at some point during the day for them to do their homework in an environment where they'll receive support if they need it. Each year group also has a team of learning mentors attached to them to help them with their learning. They go into lessons and are available during the breaks and lunchtimes too.

Sixth form student, Dristan Kastrati says: "I was a bit worried about the longer working day when I started as I used to finish much earlier, but it didn't take me long to get used to it and I think it's a really good idea. The extra time we have is used for homework, which means when you finish you can go home and relax without having to worry about it."

"If it wasn't for study time and the longer day the majority of people probably wouldn't bother doing their homework," adds sixth form student Lisa Almond.

Open plan working combined with great facilities

The school's open plan style of working and its focus on building positive relationships are immediately striking.

"Uplifting – like walking into a cathedral," is how Principal Ian Johnson describes the Marlowe Academy.

Students and staff move around the school on open galleries. The strong sense of togetherness is supported by open plan study and eating areas. This provides students with greater opportunities for more social interaction, which results in less bullying, reduced vandalism and a greater focus on learning.

Principal, Mr Ian Johnson says: "Businesses are run around relationships – motivating people, including them, enthusing them, and then dealing with any issues that may arise. This school is exactly the same. We work in the same way as a business like Saga would, with managers talking openly to people on the shop floor."

"We treat all students like adults and where there are issues we deal with them swiftly and sensibly. We see our job as supporting, motivating and making students aware of their potential."

The harbour café is at the heart of life at Marlowe. Open from 7am to 4pm it is used by everyone in the school community, from teaching staff and students, through to parents and neighbours.

Mr Johnson says: "The kids sit in our harbour café area and chat to the staff as they come in or during their breaks. Lunch is the same."

Doing things differently (cont.)

“All staff eat with the children, so it’s a really family ethos. We have a staff work room for real peace and quiet, but it’s fairly small. Most staff choose to be in the café area when they aren’t in class teaching.”

Staff and students from Year 7 through to the sixth form all agree that the open plan style of working makes a big difference to the feel of the Academy.

Year 7 student Ben Cannon says: “I think it’s amazing the way that this school has been set out. One of my mates was telling me just the other day that he didn’t like his school as it’s full of long dingy corridors, whereas we have massive high ceilings and loads of natural light. You get to know people from other year groups and more of the teachers.”

Sixth form student Dritan Kastrati agrees: “I like the way that students and teachers here work together in a really friendly way – it’s like one big happy family.”

“In other places staff and students are often separated by closed doors,” says Liz Habbershaw, Team Leader for the Sixth Form, ICT and Vocational Courses. “I even get to know the students I don’t teach by name because I see them every day.”

The equipment and facilities within the Marlowe Academy match up to its striking new exterior. For example, there are more top-notch computers and laptops at the Academy than you can shake a stick at. In Year 7 in information computer technology (ICT) at the Academy students are taught how to design and code their own computer games. By the time they reach the sixth form, students will have detailed experience in industry standard software and hardware, including networking, programming and system analysis.

Facilities also include a local authority public library, an innovation centre for new businesses, and from September 2009, a local community radio station. In return for cheap rent and support, new businesses based in the innovation centre are asked to share their experience and expertise with the Academy, by presenting to classes, providing work experience or by becoming a learning mentor.

A new £1.3m international standard eight-lane running track and state of the art facilities for discus, pole vault and high jump have boosted confidence. Add that to the school’s two sports halls, two football pitches, tennis and netball courts and you have a recipe for athletic success.

“I think I’ll make the Olympic team,” says 13-year-old sprinter Steve Walker who already represents Kent for his age in the 100 and 200 metres.

OFSTED

Achievement and standards

OFSTED says: “There is a clear trend of improvement in results in tests and examinations. 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.”

Personal development and well-being

OFSTED says: “Students are friendly and their behaviour in and around the site is generally good. In the 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 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.”

Quality of teaching

OFSTED says: “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.”

“Students say that they do 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!’”

OFSTED (cont.)

The people

External support

OFSTED says: "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. Extensive partnership work with local universities has resulted in students developing an increasing awareness of the benefits of higher education."

Liz Habbershaw Team Leader for the Sixth Form ICT and Vocational Courses

"The sixth form has grown from 55 when we opened to 80 and now 135. From our first group of sixth formers six went onto university, the following year it was 20, and then this year we have 28 who have applied. We do our best to make sure they have all the independent study skills they'll need such as research and meeting deadlines.

"Sixth form students can choose to do a BTEC National with an A-Level alongside, or they can choose to do four A-Levels, the more traditional route, so it's either or. We started off with a larger vocational BTEC National programme, and they continue to be the most popular among our students, but we do mix and match timetables according to what the students want to do. It's about giving students choice and tailoring our teaching so they can achieve their best.

"Students on vocational courses all complete work experience, which can help to give them an advantage when entering the workplace.

"The students here are fantastic. That's what I enjoy about working here the most. It's a privilege to know them and to see them go on and achieve, whether that's at work or university. It's really great to be able to make a difference."

Dristan Kastrati Sixth form student

About seven years ago, Marlowe sixth former Dristan Kastrati arrived in this country from Albania with just a word or two of English. Now he is not only remarkably fluent, but is a talented actor, singer and dancer. He says he owes his rapid progress and love of performing arts to the Marlowe Academy which specialises in the subject.

"I think people have changed their view of our school. Nobody wanted to come here before, but now they can see a real difference.

"Before the Academy opened everybody had to be prepared to stand up for themselves, because there was lots of bullying and trouble. If you didn't stand up for yourself you used to get bullied, simple as that, but here everybody is so much more relaxed.

"Whenever I sit in the café I have little kids all around me, it's not like they are in one place and we're in another, everybody is together.

"Sometimes when I've got free time I work as a teaching assistant, so I go into a class and help to teach drama or something. It's great to get involved and the younger kids listen and look up to us."

Lisa Almond Sixth form student

"The system here is very different to my old school – here people work together more. They are stricter in terms of rules and regulations, but people respect that because everybody is so friendly and they treat you well.

"We have a longer day here until 5pm, but as sixth formers we have some extra responsibility. We can decide with our teachers on the best time to take breaks, and we can sign in and out for lunch.

"There's so much space here for everything. Compared to my old school we have loads more facilities here, things like a gym and a theatre, stuff like that. There's lots of extra curriculum stuff too, so we can do things like cooking, film club, sports and singing.

"When I first came here I didn't know what I wanted to do – in fact I didn't really want to do very much to be honest, and so my mum was really worried about me. But the teachers here have been really good at encouraging me to go to university, and so I've looked into it and really want to go now. I use to think university wasn't for me, or people like me, but last year I saw people from this Academy go to university, so now I think why can't I do it too."

The people (cont.)

Ben Cannon Year 7 student

"At primary school I was always in the bottom group for maths, every year I was still there, and then as soon as I got here I started to move my way up and up. I am really proud of that and my parents are too. I was totally blown away when I made the top group here, because I didn't think I could do it. At my old school they used to just explain maths from the front of the class, but here they come around and sit with you to help and explain it. That really helps you to get it.

"There's a thing called enrichment for the last couple of sessions on a Friday. If you've completed all your homework you can do activities like book reading club, cinema club or football and tennis, things like that. Last term I did film club and this term I'm doing rugby."

Charlotte Gray Year 7 student

"I like the fact that you don't get homework here, and that we've got study time instead. You don't realise how long the day is because of the way it's broken up and with short breaks.

"I like the teachers, they are all really nice, especially my study teacher who is really good at helping me. We're also got experts – they are children in the same year who are good at helping others.

"Maths is my favourite subject as I like to work with numbers. I've moved up my maths group this year and so I'm in one of the top groups now, which I'm really proud of. I want to do the same with science next. I've stayed in the same group so I'd really like to go up like with maths.

"I enjoy the extra activities we get to do, last term I did dance club and this term I'm doing girls' football. We've got a match against another school on Thursday, so I hope we beat them."

Doug Thompson Parent

"I have a 13-year-old son at the Marlowe Academy, and have been really impressed with how they've supported and encouraged him here. He's come on leaps and bounds since starting.

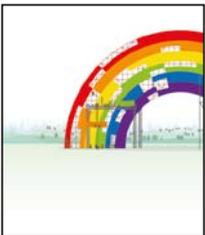
"My son had a tough time at the old school and was subject to bullying. I remember times when he was crying in bed because he didn't want to go to school. It's heartbreaking and worrying when you hear kids talking like that. Taking part in performing arts here, which is one of the Academy's specialisms, has helped to bring him out of his shell and boost his self confidence.

"It's been great how Marlowe have managed to turn things around for him. He's gone from being in the bottom stream for subjects like maths and English to being near the top.

"I found out he was getting extra work in maths, so I enquired with his teacher and it was because he was doing so well she was pushing him to do even better to achieve his best. That's exactly what I want for him.

"He's really excelled, which I put down to both the quality of the teaching and the supportive environment. He feels that it's very easy to speak to the teachers here about anything he wants to and they'll stop and listen. It's the approachability between the staff, the students and the principal here that makes the difference. It's because of the welcoming environment that the kids feel special and treated with respect, like adults. The open plan environment, where they can interact with adults, makes them feel like they are on a university campus rather than a stuffy old school.

"He's also able to do his homework in school, so he can go home at the end of the day and spend quality time with me and his mum, without us having to worry. He likes the extended school hours and I believe its helping to prepare him for a working day in the future."



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