

Enabling students to work smarter

Principal **Ian Johnson** describes how an extended school day and a high level of community involvement are central to the strategy for raising achievement at The Marlowe Academy in Ramsgate

Why do the overwhelming majority of schools run a manic day that finishes around 3.15pm? The succession of bells and queues leaves little time to talk and to think. And the shortness of lessons can easily create the feeling of a 'conveyor belt curriculum.' And what is the point of building schools with fantastic ICT facilities if students are sent home at the end of the day to places that do not have anything like the same resources, where they cannot access professionals able to help and support them? These questions have preoccupied me ever since I first qualified as a teacher back in 1982. I have also been curious about why it is that everything exciting about education is always presented as an 'add-on' to the core curriculum.

Working smarter

In setting up The Marlowe Academy, I wanted to find a way of using an extended school day as part of an overall strategy for shaping a more emotionally literate organisation. It seemed to me that getting away from the add-on approach was the key to delivering higher levels of achievement. I felt that this required:

- a low-stress environment where people were working smarter rather than harder, and had time to reflect
- time for students to build real relationships with adults so they could get to know them as real people
- a focus on putting emotional literacy at the centre of everything we do at the school
- professionals able to access students without than rushing to see everyone in the time available.

To achieve this required a school day that started at 8.30am and finished at 5pm. One session a day for each year group would be allocated for private study, supporting our goal that no one would routinely take work home. Teachers set the work, mentors supervise it; teachers collect and mark it as they would for homework elsewhere.

Teachers allocate up to 20 minutes for break in each learning session, fitting it in with the activities and learning that take place during a particular session. Students are told when they need to get back, and may lose some of their break the next time round if they are late. Lunches are scheduled as half hour breaks. Some of our vocational classes might be scheduled over two learning sessions, enabling trips and visits to take place without causing disruption elsewhere.

Building emotional literacy

My EQ coordinator, Michael Tulloch, is responsible for working with staff and students to try and ensure that the quality of communication and relationships

The Marlowe Academy

Opened in September 2005 in the former building of The Ramsgate School, and transferred to a new building in 2006. With a potential capacity of 1,100 students, including over 250 in the sixth form, it has specialisms in the performing arts and business studies.
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in the school is as good as it can be. This helps to ensure students can take full opportunity of the opportunities available to them in the school.

We have had training from The School of Emotional Literacy on how emotional literacy can underpin a rich experience of learning. Also, for the past two terms, Antidote has worked with staff and students on a strategy for making teaching and learning even more enjoyable.

Recognising that some children find it difficult to benefit from universal classroom-based provision, we have set up a number of groups – Temper, Temper, Happiness Group and Brothers and Sisters – where students can explore any issues that concern or trouble them. Over the coming year, all this work will be underpinned by our participation in Kent's pilot of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme.

Community activity

I knew from the beginning that The Academy just could not succeed on its own. You would be crazy to spend over £25m on a building and deny the community access to it. You would be even more daft to take over a school in a locality accustomed to failure for many years without wanting to work in partnership with other agencies.

Some of the ingredients of an extended school had already been introduced before my appointment. As co-sponsors of The Academy, Kent County Council had made provision for the local library and adult education to be based on site; they had also facilitated access to youth and social services. The predecessor school had developed links with Kent Police resulting in a community police liaison officer working from the site.

Our doors have opened to many other organisations. In one week recently, we welcomed Charlton Football Club, Loop Dance, Margate Cricket Club, Canterbury Christ Church University's performing arts students and over 800 Year 3-5 primary school children taking part in an ICT conference.

In their own way, each of these activities contributes to our crucial task of raising aspirations. The more community users you have, the more resources you can draw upon to support your core activities. The more your community sees the relevance and importance of learning, the easier it is to raise aspirations among your students, and the greater chance you have of sustaining any progress you make.

Experiencing care

How successful is this approach in ensuring that students feel cared for? Ofsted recently observed that:

- our students had 'many opportunities in the day

The Marlowe Day

7.30 - 8.15
Breakfast available for everyone
8.30 - 9.00
Assembly or tutorial
9.00 - 11.00
Learning 1
11.00 - 1.00
Learning 2
1.00 - 3.00
Learning 3
3.00 - 5.00
Learning 4

Advantages of the longer day		
For learning	For teachers	For students
Learning sessions can be much longer	More gaps between lessons	A more varied and unpredictable day
Traditional breaks no longer apply	Quality time to prepare	Greater emphasis upon practical subjects
Teachers teach the same amount of time, but over a 'longer' day	A chance to set real extension work	A chance to complete quality work and make real use of ICT
The mentoring role of support staff is enhanced	Meetings during the school day, not after	A framework within which to develop learning skills
Homework is a thing of the past	Take less work home	Learning mentor support
Spaces needed for students to work outside lessons	For support staff	No withdrawal from lessons
Extra-curricular activities and support work can go into individual study	Responsibilities for learning	Extra-curricular during the day
There is a clear focus on learning outside the classroom	A real mentoring role with students	Personalised learning
You can allocate more curriculum time to practical subjects	Access to students outside lessons	More time for visits and visitors
	A chance to take part in extra curricular activities	Less time to cruise the streets before mum and dad finish work!

to socialise and converse with the staff in a businesslike, yet friendly manner'

- our specialisms were having a discernible influence on 'developing the students' self-esteem and raising achievement'
- the extended day had improved continuity in learning and given students the opportunity to take more responsibility for their learning.

More insight into how students experience the environment came from the Antidote School Emotional Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS), which we ran in the autumn of 2006.

As reported in *Raising Achievement Update* 34, there is a tendency for the wellbeing of secondary students to decline steadily through Years 7 to 10, with a modest improvement after that. In significant ways, The Marlowe picture did not follow this trend.

While our students in the first term of Year 7 report a slightly lower level of wellbeing than the average, and there is a same steep drop in Year 8 as at other schools, the figures then level out before escalating sharply in Year 11 and 12 to end up at a point higher than in Year 7.

The Antidote surveys ask staff and students whether they feel capable, listened to, accepted, safe

and included (CLASI). Our students did not feel significantly safer and more listened to than other students, but they did strongly feel that they:

- were studying with people who believed in them and wanted them to do well (capable)
- could explore different ways of being themselves, rather than simply complying with others' expectations (accepted)
- had a distinctive and valued role to play within the school community (included).

The work with Antidote has helped us discover how we ensure that our students come to feel even safer and more listened to. This has led to the setting up of an Emotional Literacy Group with a brief to develop ideas that will lead to:

- more structured opportunities for students to unwind
- a whole-school strategy for releasing stress in lessons
- a 'students as researchers' project on how to improve peer relationships
- much more student involvement in the activities of school council
- a better understanding in students of how they learn well, which they can then share with staff.

Impact on achievement

When The Marlowe Academy was first announced four years ago, only 5% of students at The Ramsgate School, which it was to replace, achieved five A*-C GCSE grades. It had risen to just under 18% when the school closed in August 2005. The figure for 2006 was 29% and, for 2007, 40%. Numbers of passes with five A*-C grades, including maths and English, have risen from 2% in 2005 to 7% in 2007.

I believe these results show that we have begun to transform our students' attitudes towards learning, and that we are now in a position to give them the life chances that they never previously had.

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Lessons from The Marlowe Academy

- Working with your community is essential if you are to raise standards and create sustainability.
- Working within a multi-agency framework is crucial if teachers are to focus fully on teaching and learning.
- Time can be used creatively and flexibly to support school improvement.
- Longer sessions are essential to developing student learning skills.
- A lot of what we currently consider homework can be completed during an extended school day.
- It is possible to reduce the demands being made on teachers' time beyond the working day.
- We don't need new buildings and facilities to fundamentally change the way an institution works.

