

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mrs K Ross  
Headteacher  
Treviglas Community College  
Bradley Road  
Newquay  
Cornwall  
TR7 3JA

Dear Mrs Ross

### **Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 2 and 3 July 2013 to look at work in English.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with you and with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 10 lessons.

### **The overall effectiveness of English is good.**

#### **Achievement in English is good.**

- The attainment of students in GCSE English has been average over the past three years. It improved from below average to average in 2012, and the college's data indicate that it is likely to be above average in 2013.
- From their attainment on entry to the school, which is broadly average, students are now making good progress. Previous gaps in the achievement of more able students are closing. This is due to the college's high expectations that all students will exceed the expected levels of progress.
- Students are fully engaged in their English lessons and enjoy the many opportunities they are given to develop skills such as analysis, problem solving, debating and working in a team. Their behaviour is exemplary.

- Standards in A level English courses are broadly average but improving, especially at AS level where more students than previously are attaining the higher grades.

### **Teaching in English is good.**

- The quality of teaching is variable, but good overall and there are examples of outstanding teaching.
- Key features of the most effective teaching are high expectations, secure subject knowledge and skilful use of assessment to ascertain and extend the level of understanding of all students. In such lessons, the teachers adapt their questions and the lesson activities and pace to students' differing levels of learning, and ensure that each individual makes rapid and sustained progress. This is not the case in all lessons. In a small minority of lessons, the pace of learning is slow for most students and more able students are not challenged enough to make good progress.
- In all lessons, good relationships create a positive climate for learning where students are confident to take risks and contribute their views without fear of giving a wrong answer. Students, including those in the sixth form, speak fondly of memorable lessons that involved the use of drama, debates, music, film and computers to help them understand the texts studied. These lessons were clearly effective.
- Teachers apply the college assessment policy to very good effect. All students know their actual and target levels and grades. They know how to improve their work through curricular targets and the teachers' written comments in marking. Students respond to the comments and demonstrate how they have improved their work.

### **The curriculum in English is outstanding.**

- The English curriculum is exemplary in its breadth and flexibility to meet the needs of all students. Lessons provide a very good balance in developing skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. These skills are enhanced in independent study projects for homework, for example involving research, creative writing and presentations about topics such as the sea. Transition projects with partner primary schools enable students to get off to a flying start in English at the college.
- An exceptionally wide range of intervention activities is raising standards for underachieving students. Lessons in phonics (the blending of letters and sounds) are improving students' reading ages significantly. Lessons specifically for underachieving boys, involving for instance drama, computers and film making, bring the subject alive and motivate them to read and write.
- The 'Effective Learning Centre' successfully supports students with any learning or personal difficulties, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, enabling them to integrate fully in lessons. Specific support is also provided for students who are at an early stage of learning English, which enables them to progress as well as their peers.

- The curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of activities including visiting authors, theatre trips, World Book Week events, an Olympic reading challenge and writing competitions. The college is the lead school in the region for a project with the Royal Shakespeare Company, which involved a joint production with local primary schools based on Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'.

### **Leadership and management of English are outstanding.**

- Outstanding subject leadership is inspiring staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all students through a creative and engaging curriculum. High expectations are shared by setting challenging targets for students and staff. Students' progress is monitored and evaluated regularly and teachers prepare plans for raising the attainment of underachieving students. As a result of this and regular staff appraisal and professional development, standards in English are rising.
- Clear direction is provided for staff by comprehensive policies, for example in assessment and marking, and by an English improvement plan. The plan is evaluated regularly to ensure improvements are rapid. It is informed by accurate self-evaluation, including lesson observations, examination of students' work and teachers' planning, and surveys and discussions with students. This ensures that priorities for improvement are identified.
- Given the highly effective systems that have been established, and that staff regularly share good and outstanding practice, the English faculty has strong capacity for further improvement.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- making sure that the quality of teaching is at least good in all lessons and increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
  - sharing the best practice in assessing students' progress constantly throughout the lesson
  - adapting activities, pace and especially questions, to challenge all students to make rapid and sustained progress towards their target level.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Sue Frater**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**