

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr C E Eves
Headteacher
Tavistock College
Crowndale Road
Tavistock
Devon
PL19 8DD

Dear Mr Eves

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and the pupils, during my visit on 22-23 November 2006 to look at work in English.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on our current theme: the provision for poetry. 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in English

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Standards at the end of Key stage 3 and 4 have improved recently and are now above national and local averages. In the sixth form, they are in line with national averages.
- Although the achievement gap between boys and girls is still too wide, the school has put in place sensible strategies to address the issue. It is too soon to judge the impact of these strategies, but there are 'green shoots' appearing and the progress of boys since September is promising.
- Standards in speaking and listening are good throughout the school.

- Standards of handwriting and presentation are in need of improvement.

Quality of teaching and learning in English

Teaching and learning are good overall.

- Teaching is effective because teachers are highly skilled and have a passion for their subject.
- Lessons are very well planned with interesting texts and activities, clear learning objectives, good differentiation and, in most cases, a brisk pace. This ensures that students are on task and are well motivated. They are keen to do well and although some of their work is untidy, their attitudes towards English are generally positive.
- Assessment systems are well designed to ensure that students have a clear idea about what level they are working at and how to improve their work.
- The marking of students' work varies. In some instances it is not sufficiently detailed or analytical.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The English curriculum is well planned to ensure that there is a good balance between the teaching of English skills and their application.
- The annual review of the curriculum by the whole department helps to ensure that it is kept relevant to the needs of the different groups of pupils.
- There is a good balance between literature and language and the use of imaginative and relevant texts helps to ensure high levels of student motivation. Motivation is also encouraged by well planned and timed enrichment activities which are a regular feature of the English curriculum.

Leadership and management in English

Leadership and management are good.

- The English department is very well led and organised by the head of department and she is well supported by the school leadership team.
- All members of the department have a clear understanding of development priorities and the improvement plan is well conceived, although the success criteria are not easily measurable.
- Very detailed and effective monitoring ensures that weaknesses in teaching and learning are quickly identified and resolved.

- Resources are well organised and there are close links with the school library which is having a positive impact on raising standards in reading.

Provision for poetry

The provision for poetry is outstanding.

- Poetry is very well planned and occupies a central position in the English curriculum. Units are well designed to inspire students.
- Assessment criteria are well used to track student progress in their understanding and writing of poetry.
- Teachers have a passion for the subject with many modelling their own poetry in their teaching. As a result, students are well motivated to read, write and study poetry.
- Enrichment activities such as poetry competitions, involvement in the National Poetry Day and having their poetry published also help to motivate students.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The school is clearly committed to ensuring that all pupils have equal access to the English curriculum.
- Underachieving students are well supported in smaller groups and with well differentiated work.
- Although few in number, students who speak English as an additional language are well supported.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that marking consistently provides detailed, analytical feedback to students on the quality of their work and how they can improve it
- improve the quality of handwriting and written presentation by ensuring that teachers' expectations are raised
- develop measurable success criteria to monitor the impact of improvement strategies.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority.

All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Chris Nye
Her Majesty's Inspector