

Tavistock College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113539
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311310
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Pyner HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1769
Sixth form	410
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mandy Govier
Headteacher	Colin Eves
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2005
School address	Crowndale Road Tavistock PL19 8DD
Telephone number	01822 614231
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Tavistock is much larger than the average secondary school and serves an extensive area of rural west Devon. Almost half of the students travel to and from the college by bus. Since 1996 it has been a specialist language college. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is low, about half the national figure, and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. However, the percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national figure. Most students are from a White British heritage and the percentage of young people from minority ethnic groups or whose first language is not English is much lower than that found nationally. Overall, students' attainment on entry to the college is slightly above the national average. The college operates a small learning support unit partly funded by the local authority. Two members of the senior management team have been absent for long periods over the last year.

The college has gained the International School and Sportsmark awards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this college requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. Significant improvement is required in relation to addressing the legacy of boys' underachievement and the inadequate achievement of some groups of students.

Whilst the college provides an acceptable standard of education, its overall effectiveness is inadequate. This is because, despite improvements in the overall standards achieved in the results at GCSE in 2008, particularly in English, mathematics and the college's specialism, modern foreign languages, progress is unsatisfactory for boys and lower ability students. This trend of significant underachievement by these groups is a continuing one and the progress made by these groups has yet to benefit fully from the newly developed systems to track students' progress. These tracking systems to monitor the performance of different groups of students are not used effectively at a strategic level. As a result, intervention strategies are not sharply focused and lack the rigour to improve rates of progress. This is particularly the case in the monitoring of the progress made by groups of boys and girls of different ability, looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This situation has not been helped by the lack of a settled college leadership team.

Inspectors found an unusually high level of dissatisfaction amongst parents who returned the confidential questionnaire regarding the behaviour of students. Over half of the parents noted concerns about behaviour. Some staff at all levels, as well as students, also expressed concerns, in particular about low-level disruption, and the lack of consistent approaches to behaviour management. Observations during the inspection found behaviour to be satisfactory overall. However, given the level and consistency of concerns expressed by members of the college community, it is clear that these must be addressed as a priority.

Teaching, although satisfactory overall, is variable across the college, partly due to there being no whole-college approach to improving teaching and learning. Teachers work hard and their subject knowledge is generally good but they do not make effective use of assessment information to ensure students of all ability levels are suitably challenged. Relationships between the students and the teachers are generally good, the personal development and well-being of students in the sixth form are good.

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and the impact of this can be seen in the improved standards achieved in the most recent GCSE examinations. Students enjoy a very broad range of extra-curricular activities and clubs.

The college has undergone a prolonged period of instability at senior management level. During this time the principal and senior leaders have worked hard to ensure that the college meets the needs of the students and, overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. However, prolonged absences by senior leaders have had the effect of diverting staff from the focus of the college's continuing development and strategic use of information and performance data. Middle managers have continued to develop the curriculum, support staff and lead improvements in their subjects, but in some cases, they have lacked guidance and support at a strategic level. The new chair of governors is determined to support the senior leadership in its drive for improvement and has a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses. Despite

the instability of the senior leadership team, the college has the capacity to make the required improvements.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

This large sixth form provides a satisfactory standard of education. Achievement is satisfactory overall with a rise in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades at A-level in the latest results. Standards are broadly average but higher in applied and vocational subjects.

Students' personal development and well-being are good as a result of their thorough involvement in the life of the college at a number of levels. Older students support younger students through mentoring, shared reading and organising assemblies that are often both entertaining and thought provoking. Local charities also benefit from fund raising activities. There are opportunities for students to take part in sports, but they do not all enjoy regular exercise as part of their curriculum. Students behave sensibly, safely and attendance is good.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching is often good in lessons, but not always. Students say that sometimes teaching can be dull and lack challenge. On the other hand, they note that some teaching is outstanding and allows them good opportunities to learn independently, research and explore their understanding and skills. This lack of consistency in teaching means that not all students achieve as well as they could. The use of assessment is also not consistent, even though the college collects a wide range of information. Lesson planning is not always focused on learning and this is an area that is being addressed.

The curriculum is highly academic and offers a broad range of A-level courses and a small but increasing range of vocational courses. There is limited provision for vocational and applied subjects with the result that students who do not wish to follow an academic route leave the college at the end of Year 11. The new director of the sixth form is changing the way it is led and managed, making sure that students' learning is at the centre of all decisions. However, the impact of this has not yet been seen.

What the school should do to improve further

- Tackle the legacy of boys' underachievement and the inadequate progress of some groups of students through the strategic analysis of data to plan targeted interventions.
- Ensure behaviour is of a consistently high standard around the school and in all lessons.
- Ensure teaching consistently uses assessment information on students' performance to secure learning which matches the differing needs of students.
- Establish stable senior leadership which effectively and strategically uses information on the performance of the school to secure improved outcomes for learners' achievement and personal development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students enter the school with standards that are slightly above average. Unvalidated results for 2008 show standards are broadly in line with the national average, with GCSE outcomes indicating clear improvements on the previous year. Particularly noteworthy is the significant improvement in the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. This is partly because of substantial restructuring of the curriculum and improvements in attendance. Procedures for setting targets in modern foreign languages

has been developed to reflect individual performance by students. This has resulted in the targets being met for these subjects at GCSE A* to C this year but this improvement only brings attainment in line with national averages with the exception of Spanish

The downward trend of unsatisfactory progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 has been arrested. Despite this improvement, concerns remain over the legacy of underachievement by boys and lower ability students. Student performance data is not being used strategically to identify such underperformance and to ensure that targeted action is implemented to bring about improvement. As a result, the rate that boys and other groups of students progress in their learning is too slow and therefore, their achievement over time is inadequate. The college has recently improved its use of performance data to set sufficiently challenging targets for all students. However, the Year 11 targets for 2008 were not achieved.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. Parents, staff and students raised concerns about inconsistencies in behaviour around the college and in lessons. During the inspection behaviour observed was satisfactory overall with some evidence of low-level disruption in lessons and inappropriate behaviour around the college. Addressing the areas of concern expressed by these members of the college community is a priority for the college.

Students have a satisfactory understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and many eat healthily at lunchtime. There is a high take-up of after school sports and other clubs enabled by the provision of 'late buses'. The school employs a full-time qualified outdoor education specialist, and many students take advantage of the opportunities available through this provision. However, parents note that smoking takes place on the site. Members of the college senate are supportive of the school and play an active part in its development. Students participate in the local community through, for example, helping to raise substantial amounts of money for local, national and international charities and musical events. The college has active links with schools in Uganda and India that encourage students to appreciate the needs of others. There are established exchanges with schools in Japan, Germany and Spain, bringing visitors from abroad and promoting global awareness. The result of this is that the college has recently been re-accredited for the International School award.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. However, the good and better teaching and learning seen within the college are not shared widely enough and so the quality is inconsistent between teachers and subjects. Most teachers display good subject knowledge and generally plan their lessons well. However, lesson planning techniques are not consistent across the college, and the variety of activities is not always sufficiently appropriate to challenge and engage all learners, particularly boys. Teachers use resources well, including interactive whiteboards, to stimulate students' interest and support learning. There are good relationships between the students and the teachers, but the pace of learning can be too slow and fails to ensure that students make sufficiently rapid progress. Students are regularly involved in paired work and shared assessment of tasks undertaken. Assessment information is not used effectively

or consistently and lesson plans do not always make it clear how the needs of different groups of learners will be catered for. The result of this is that some students find the work too difficult and some too easy. In less successful lessons, students do not participate enough, nor do the teachers check their progress individually. However, in the best lessons, students' engagement with their learning is strong, and they have a clear understanding of their targets and how to improve. In these lessons students clearly enjoy their learning and achieve well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The college has acted positively to address the deficiencies in the curriculum identified by the last inspection and the impact of this shows in improved standards in 2008. Lesson lengths have now been standardised, time for core subjects has been increased, and at least two hours of good quality physical education is now available to all students. Provision for religious studies and personal development (including citizenship and health education) has improved because they are now taught by a specialist team of teachers in discrete timetabled slots. The curriculum in modern foreign languages has been modified in order to ensure a greater match to students' needs and to make it more accessible to less able students. Provision for 'fast-track' GCSEs has recently been made available to students in Year 7. All students now study information and communication technology (ICT), and preparation for future work and employment has been addressed by the adoption of a specialist course at Key Stage 4. The college has found work experience placements difficult to secure in the local area, and recognises that other workplace skills, such as financial and enterprise capability, are not yet developed in any systematic way. The curriculum provides satisfactory opportunities for the majority of learners to enjoy their education and achieve, although some groups of students, notably boys, do not benefit as greatly as they might. The college provides an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities for personal enrichment, and take-up is very high.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

There are relatively new arrangements for tracking learners' academic progress and sharing this information with them and their parents. However, although learners are aware of their targets, based on the analysis of recently introduced data, they do not always receive sufficient guidance on how to achieve them in manageable steps. Tracking is used at Key Stages 4 and 5 to identify individual learners who fail to make expected progress but this information is not used strategically to identify and target intervention for groups of students who are underachieving. Exclusions from college have significantly reduced through the work of heads of year, the year-based learning mentors and the well managed learning centre where students benefit from planned, phased re-integration programmes tailored to their individual needs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are appropriately supported by teaching assistants and some achieve well but, along with other groups of students, their progress is not systematically tracked. Overall, there is a trend of unsatisfactory progress by students supported through college action. The college generally works well with outside agencies, including the police and youth service. However, the progress and welfare of looked after children are not tracked and their opinions are only sought if individual underachievement is identified. Careers advice, guidance and effective links with the Connexions service ensure that students receive appropriate advice about the choices they make at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13. The college has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now close to the national

figure. The creation of the student services office and work area has enabled better communication between the various staff involved in student guidance. The college has effective child protection, safeguarding, and health and safety systems in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The principal has set a clear direction for the college and has taken decisive action to improve curriculum provision and develop sufficient time for subjects, in particular English and mathematics. This has had an impact on standards in the most recent unvalidated GCSE results. Middle leaders are generally positive about the changes in time allocation for subjects. They work hard to develop their departments and create a good supportive ethos for new staff. However, departments tend to work in isolation and the recent absences at senior management level have meant that strategic support has not been available in a consistent manner. This instability has affected all parts of the college with the result that staff have not been able to work as effectively as they could. For example, some support staff feel that communication within the college is not as clear as it could be.

The college now has secure data through which individual students' progress is monitored. However, it is not yet used strategically to track different groups of students to identify and implement targeted interventions to improve achievement. Consequently, the effective and efficient use of resources to achieve value for money is inadequate. A range of management information is collected including the outcomes of lesson observations and the views of parents and students. However, there is no strategic use of this to drive college developments despite the fact that communication with parents was an area for improvement from the last inspection. This lack of strategic direction in using information from stakeholders is underlined by the finding that over two fifths of those parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt that their views were insufficiently taken into account by the college.

Governance is satisfactory. The new chair of governors is determined and committed to improvement across the college. She has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, particularly the challenge of improving the progress made by groups of students. Governors are developing greater involvement in the college in order to hold it to account.

The impact of the specialism in modern foreign languages on whole school improvement has been limited. The most recent focus has been on improving the weak levels of standards and attainment in all of the specialist subjects. Unvalidated results in 2008 indicate that standards in all the specialist school subjects have improved to be in line with national averages. Standards in Spanish have risen to be above the national average. Curriculum changes in 2006 have had a positive effect on the development of the specialism and have played a significant role in supporting the improvements in standards. Historically, targets have not been set based on accurate analysis of the data. However, current targets are appropriately challenging and tracking of individual students' performance has improved. The college has had a positive impact in supporting the development of languages with local primary schools and in its work internationally. A key strength of the specialism is the contribution that it makes to students' understanding and experience of the international community. Students speak highly of the enrichment opportunities offered by the college.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	2
The attendance of learners	3	3
The behaviour of learners	3	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Tavistock College, Tavistock PL19 8DD

Thank you all for welcoming the inspection team on our recent inspection of your college. Special thanks should go to the student guides who helped us find our way around the college on the first day. A great many of you took the time to talk to us and show us your work and we enjoyed our time with you. It was very informative to hear your views and it helped us to reach our judgements. This letter is to inform you of our findings.

As a result of our inspection, we have given your college a notice to improve. I want to explain what this means.

Your college is helping you to grow into well rounded and positive individuals. Your sixth form is particularly effective in this aspect. The curriculum timetable has been improved to give more teaching time for some subjects and this has resulted in better GCSE results, particularly in English and mathematics, in 2008. The results achieved at the end of Year 13 are average, although last year more students achieved the highest grades at A level. There are good results in applied and vocational subjects.

However, we have judged that the progress that you make in your learning from Year 7 to Year 11 is not as good as it could be, especially for boys and those students who have difficulty with learning. In other words, although the rate of progress you make and the levels you reach have improved, you can achieve even more. This is due in part to a lack of targeted support and guidance for those students who are not making the progress they should. Your achievement and levels of performance are not being tracked and managed as well as they could be at a strategic level. There is a system to track your progress but we found teachers do not consistently use assessment information to match lessons to your abilities and plan your next steps in learning.

In interviews with inspectors some of you said that you were concerned about the behaviour of other students which can disrupt your learning. Your parents also told us that they had concerns about this. We have asked the college to ensure behaviour is of a consistently high standard around the school and in all lessons.

Inspectors will visit the college to check on progress. You can support this process by working hard and making the most of the learning opportunities offered to you.

Yours faithfully

Robert Pyner

Her Majesty's Inspector