

# Taunton Senior School

Inspection report for boarding school

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	6 November 2006

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

Taunton School has three parts to it: the Senior School for pupils aged between 13 and 18 years; the Preparatory School for pupils aged between seven and 13 years; and the Pre-Prep and First Steps Nursery with about 125 children, aged from two to seven years. All parts of the school are on the same site and share a common purpose. The school is co-educational and inter-denominational and children of all beliefs can attend. In addition, there is Taunton School International for approximately 80 overseas students, which is situated adjacent to the main campus.

Taunton School is a boarding school with a substantial number of day pupils. Within Taunton Senior School, there are four boarding houses: Weirfield and its annexe, accommodating approximately 90 girls; Fairwater with about 70 boys; and Wills East and Wills West, each accommodating between 35 to 45 boys. Each house has a houseparent, with Weirfield being run by the houseparent and his wife. The house-parents live in the boarding houses, together with their families and a resident house tutor. Each house also has non-resident tutors attached to it. At the time of this inspection there were approximately 236 boarders in the Senior School.

### **Summary**

This was an announced inspection to assess Taunton Senior School against the national minimum standards for boarding schools. The recommendations made at the previous inspection were reviewed to monitor the school's progress in addressing these matters.

The overall standard of boarding provision is good, with some outstanding features. The leadership and management of the school's boarding provision is strong. The effective internal systems and good communication across the four houses contribute to promoting and sustaining boarders' welfare. Robust child protection policies and practice alongside the excellent level of personal support and care given to boarders help to keep them safe; bullying is extremely rare. Children enjoy living in the inclusive boarding houses where every boarder has the opportunity to participate in school and boarding life and to take part in a wide range of activities. The rolling programme of refurbishment continues to upgrade the quality of the boarding premises. Three shortfalls in standards were found during the inspection and recommendations are made for improvement in these identified areas.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Nine recommendations were made at the previous inspection and eight of these have been satisfactorily addressed by the school. These improvements include: stock records of homely medication are maintained; a missing pupil policy has been developed; fire risk assessments are reviewed annually; environmental risk assessments are regularly updated; the maintenance programme has secured adequate heating and water pressure in all boarding houses; the daytime security of boarding houses has been reviewed; and senior staff regularly monitor boarding house documentation.

The school was asked to ensure that their recruitment and selection processes addressed all points outlined within the national minimum standards. However, minor omissions in recruitment were identified and a further recommendation is made.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

A comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education is delivered through the curriculum, tutor groups, boarding house staff and the medical centre. The programme addresses topics such as smoking, sexual health, the dangers of using drugs and consuming alcohol. The information is delivered appropriately to different age groups and parents are kept fully informed about the programme on the school website. New pupils in Year 9 are introduced to the medical centre at the beginning of term, where they can meet the nurses and discover what health services are available to support them whilst at Taunton School. There is plenty of health promotion literature available in the medical centre and the school has sound policies to counter known risks to health.

Medical care and attention is primarily provided by qualified nurses at the school medical centre. The medical centre is open from 8am to 7.30pm, providing on-call cover when closed and remains open to care for ill boarders if required overnight. There are sound policies and procedures in relation to medical care and made known to all staff through the handbook. Boarders and staff report that they receive a good response from the medical centre. The nurses are managed by a senior nurse and the team receive professional support and guidance from visiting doctors and the local surgery where boarders are registered. Where appropriate, the school liaises with community health professionals to ensure that boarders' individual needs are met. A visiting physiotherapist and counsellor provide additional services to boarders as required.

The boarding houses keep a small amount of pain relief medication to give to boarders during evenings and at week-ends; clear records are maintained. The medication issued to boarding houses is securely stored, however, medication requiring refrigeration in one house was not secure and at risk of being lost or misused. Parental consent is obtained to ensure that medical care is given to boarders in accordance with parents' wishes. Good use of email and electronic forms assist with the speed of return of this consent, particularly for parents who live overseas. Significant health information about boarders is made known to boarding house staff. Other school staff are provided with medical information on 'a needs to know basis'; for example, when taking some boarders off site on a trip, they may need to be aware of pupils who suffer with asthma, allergies or have particular health needs. The school recognises the importance of training boarding house staff and other key personnel in first aid skills; all staff receive first aid training from the senior nurse, with regular refresher courses. The nurses regularly update their professional training to maintain their professional registration. In addition to general nursing, the nurses are knowledgeable about specific health matters. For example: nutrition; eating disorders; vaccinations; drugs awareness; peer support; and skills in health promotion. Boarders report that they are very well looked after when they are unwell; one said, 'school is like one big family, everybody looks after each other'.

There is good communication between the catering team and the medical centre, identifying any boarders with allergies or special dietary needs. The catering is of a high standard, providing an extensive range of nutritious meals, served in sufficient quantity. Lunch offers a choice from

two meat dishes, two vegetarian dishes and a salad bar. The majority of boarders enjoy the food, taking into consideration, the variation in personal preferences and tastes. One boarder said, 'I like any of the food; some of the pudding is very good!' Three cooked meals are available each day in the school dining room where all meals are served. Snacks of toast and fruit are provided in the boarding houses along with a tuck shop. Boarders are able to voice their views about the food directly to the chef and the catering team through forums and pupil questionnaires. Celebration of cultural events such as Chinese New Year and International Days are incorporated into themed meals that occur every week. The local authority environmental health department has given the school a five star award for food hygiene and no recommendations were made.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Boarders' welfare is safeguarded by robust policies and procedures and sound boarding practices. For example, the school has comprehensive policies and informative guidance available to parents, staff and pupils addressing and raising awareness of bullying issues, including cyber-bullying. Bullying is not tolerated and incidents of bullying in boarding are extremely rare. Only four boarders out of 192 boarders surveyed said they had experienced being bullied; this is a very low percentage compared to similar schools. One of these said, 'I was bullied, but I was very well looked after and I am not bullied now'. There was good evidence found during the inspection that two of the three other boarders, who had said they had been bullied, had already been identified by the school as having particular support needs and good welfare plans were in place to monitor their well-being. A high number of the boarders emphasised what a friendly school Taunton Senior is, how well boarders get on with each other and that bullying just did not happen in their houses. For example, one boarder said, 'I enjoy everything at Taunton School, especially the people who are all friendly'.

Excellent child protection policies and practice, including use of the internet, contribute to keeping boarders safe. The policy was updated during the inspection to include the recent commencement of the Independent Safeguarding Association's vetting and barring processes. The school's designated child protection lead person has a sound knowledge of child protection matters and current safeguarding practice. Good liaison and working relationships have been established with local agencies to work together to protect young people and the school responds appropriately to any safeguarding issue. All staff receive training in child protection and staff know how to respond to any suspicion or allegation of abuse. The school has a missing person's policy in place, outlining the measures staff should take to secure the safe return of any missing pupil. Boarders say they feel protected and benefit from the good advice given to them by staff about how to keep out of danger. For example, one boarder said, 'staff look after us really well; they are very kind and I think they do their best to protect us'. The boarding houses operate a house prefect system which works well, providing a level of support and supervision to boarders from sixth form pupils. Prefects are selected on the basis of their suitability for the duties and responsibilities of their role. These are clearly defined by the houseparents, and house prefects receive induction training to guide them in dealing with any allegations of bullying or child protection issues. Boarders reported that they appreciated the help given to them by the older boarders. One boarder said, 'prefects and Heads of House are kind and understanding as they have experience of boarding and have come across similar problems before'.

The school's guides for parents and boarders, 'Worries and Complaints' provides simply written information about how to raise a concern. Any complaint made by parents or boarders about boarding practices are promptly dealt with and recorded. Few complaints have been received and outcomes of complaints are noted. There is a strong emphasis on both prefects and staff listening to any concern, being approachable and taking action as appropriate to deal with identified issues. For example, one girl said, 'the sixth form girls sorted it out for me'. Boarders are also able to contact persons outside the school to raise their concerns.

High standards of behaviour are expected by the school and any misdemeanour is appropriately dealt with, for example, smoking. Sanctions given to boarders are recorded and this document is regularly monitored by senior staff. All sanctions given were found to be in accordance with the school's policy guidance and discipline is consistent across the boarding houses. Boarders and parents report that disciplinary measures are fairly given. One parent said, 'boarding achieves the perfect balance of discipline and a 'home atmosphere'.

Entry into boarding houses is restricted by card access and boarding provision is secure from public intrusion. The use of CCTV for surveillance of the grounds provides added protection and does not intrude on boarders' reasonable privacy. Fencing has been recently erected to the front of Weirfield House; this now provides the girl's boarding house with sufficient privacy from visitors using the main school drive. Within boarding houses, boarders' privacy is respected and staff supervision does not intrude unnecessarily on boarder's privacy at any time. Boarders have locks on their bedroom doors and staff knock to seek permission to enter their rooms.

Health and safety matters within the school are rigorously assessed and monitored and appropriate action is taken to address each issue. Boarding staff complete training in health and safety issues and take responsibility for the safety of their houses. All boarding staff complete training in fire awareness and regular fire drills, including night-time drills, are undertaken, to ensure that everyone knows how to evacuate the boarding house in an emergency situation. Regular fire safety checks of equipment and installations are made and comprehensive risk assessments are in place for the boarding houses, school and grounds. The school is vigilant in taking all practicable steps to ensure that boarders are not entrusted to adults who have not been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). For example, taxi firms are checked and there is a written agreement between the school and any non-employed resident spouse, specifying the terms of their accommodation and guidance on contact with boarders and the supervision of their visitors.

Senior managers within the school complete training in safer recruitment practices and the school follows these principles. CRB checks are undertaken, prior to the employment of boarding staff. In exceptional circumstances, an ancillary member of staff was employed prior to clearance; however, they were closely supervised in their duties during this period to ensure pupils were protected. Personnel records looked at showed some omissions in following the guidance highlighted within the national minimum standards. These shortfalls were in relation to obtaining written references for all staff, rather than telephone references, and ensuring that direct contact was made by the school with each referee to verify the written reference. There is a robust system in place for all new staff to complete three and six monthly probationary reviews to monitor their suitability and performance.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

An extensive range of clubs and activities are available for boarders to use during their free time, both inside the boarding houses and within the wider school and community. The cellar, in Fairwater, provides a very popular recreational area within that particular boarding house. Boarders have access to sporting, musical, dramatic and other opportunities and they are also encouraged to participate in community service placements. Events organised by the school are of a high quality; for example, during the inspection, many boarders performed in an excellent evening musical production. Sixth form students enjoy spending their free time at 'the Guvvy', the sixth form social centre. One boarder summarised most boarders' views, 'it is amazing fun and there is much to do'.

Boarders appreciate and benefit from the excellent pastoral care provided within boarding and from across the school. Regular senior pastoral team and boarding house discussions ensure that any boarder with particular welfare or emotional needs is provided with well planned support and their well-being is closely monitored. Staff demonstrate insight and sensitivity in meeting individual needs and there are a number of ways boarders can access personal support from different people. For example, boarders can seek advice and support from: house-parents; tutors; any member of staff, including senior staff and the Headteacher; the Chaplain; the school counsellor; the independent listener; staff in the medical centre; and Heads of House and house and school prefects. Individual tutoring and mentoring is available to each pupil and the established peer mentoring scheme offers boarders yet another avenue within which to seek help. Boarders value the good care provided by the house staff. Their comments include, 'house-parents are fantastic and will do everything they can to help you anytime of day' and 'the house-parents are really helpful to everyone; it is like talking to your real parents and they always know what to do'. Pupils with additional needs receive outstanding support from the academic development department and effective links are established with external professional and specialist agencies to meet individual need.

The school operates an equal opportunities policy and each pupil is regarded as an individual of equal worth and importance. Diversity is respected and celebrated and there is no discrimination evidenced within the boarding houses. International menu days regularly take place where pupils enjoy meals from different parts of the world and major festivals, such as Russian Christmas and Chinese New Year are celebrated. The Christian ethos of the school underpins the school community and the inclusion of pupils of all faiths. Arrangements are made which enable pupils to follow their own religion and adhere to their principles and beliefs. For example, Muslim boarders have privacy for prayer and special catering arrangements are made during Ramadan. International pupils benefit from the sensitive and caring support provided on an individual basis by the staff from the Centre for English as a Foreign Language. The staff provide a mixture of academic and pastoral help which extends to all areas of school life, helping pupils from overseas to adjust to and integrate into English boarding school life. The overseas student secretary arranges social occasions and cultural trips to help facilitate the integration of international boarders. Survey responses evidence how very positive boarders feel about living in the boarding provision and attending Taunton Senior School. Boarders' comments include: 'the boarding house I live in is very good; people are very nice so I feel happy';

'teachers here care a lot about the students', 'it is always a pleasure to be here; the best decision of my life!'.



## Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are able to express their views and contribute to the operation of boarding provision. One boarder said, 'you are asked how you think things are and how you are getting on'. Most boarders choose to speak directly with their house-parent or tutors about arising issues; they are confident that their views are listened to and taken seriously. For example, following requests from boarders, the frequency of 'brunch' on Sundays has increased and there are more opportunities to watch films. Boarders of all ages feel able to fully contribute to their house meetings and are confident that their head of house and house prefects represent their views in more formal systems, for example, at the sixth form forum. The middle school forum also offers a route for younger pupils to express their opinions. A number of house prefects are also school prefects and attend School Council meetings where they are able to advocate on behalf of the boarding community with regard to general school issues. This is summarised by one boarder who said, 'prefects in the houses listen to younger students' views and meet with senior teachers in school to make improvements based on students' concerns and opinions'.

A number of innovative participation mechanisms enable any boarder to have a say about boarding practices and school issues. For example, boarders contributed their views about their boarding experiences within the DVD produced about the school. Furthermore, some sixth form boarders who are not house prefects, have been able to develop their leadership skills and self-confidence by taking responsibility for specific matters within boarding, such as arranging social events and outings at week-ends. A parent commented, 'the school encourages children to be involved in the running of the house; from welcoming new pupils to organising events and running the tuck shop'. Boarders are encouraged to consider and help others by participating in charitable work. Boarders in Weirfield House sponsor a young girl in Africa; they regularly organise fund raising events to raise money to support the girl and her community.

New boarders receive an outstanding level of support to enable them to settle in to boarding life at Taunton Senior School. The house handbooks contain useful information and are written in a user-friendly style, which appeals to children and answers key questions that both children and their parents are likely to have. Arrangements are made for new boarders to have a 'buddy'; this is an experienced boarder, who is willing to offer support and be ready to answer any questions during the first few weeks. Both 'buddies' and new boarders report that this system works very well and helps to establish firm friendships. Form tutors and house-parents also closely monitor the welfare of new boarders. One new boarder said, 'having moved into my boarding house and Taunton School four weeks ago, I already feel very much part of the school. The atmosphere and care are brilliant; a true second home!' A parent also emphasised how well the school introduces children into boarding life; they wrote, 'exceptional house-parents who are tireless in their efforts to reassure new boarders'.

Boarders can maintain private contact with their families and friends. Many boarders have their own mobile phones and staff trust them to use these sensibly, enabling boarders to call their families at mutually convenient times. The school has allowed an international boarder to set up 'Skype' to provide a video link to their family overseas. Public telephones are available within boarding houses and boarders can also ask permission to use the staff phone to contact their families. Boarding houses have a number of computers available for boarders to access email and 'Face-book'; many boarders have their own laptops and have access to the internet. Restrictions on the use of the internet within the school safeguards pupils' welfare.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The 'house bank' provides boarders with a secure system for the safe keeping of pocket money. Boarders are given keys to their rooms and they are able to secure their possessions therein. However, many choose not to lock their doors as they consider boarding provision to be a safe environment. There are few recorded incidents of items going missing; however, any incident of theft is taken seriously by the school and is not tolerated within the school community.

Boarding and teaching facilities are on the same campus and boarders move easily and safely between venues. A rolling programme of refurbishment is in place which is continually improving the quality of boarding accommodation. Three parents out of the 41 parents who had responded to the survey, mentioned that they considered some boarding accommodation required improvement. However, one parent noted there had been some improvement in the standard of accommodation; they said, 'the facilities and décor of the boarding house have been much improved over the last couple of years'. The school reports that they are investing in improving the quality of boarding provision. Boarders spoken with during the inspection said they were satisfied with their accommodation and very few of the 192 boarders' survey responses identified any accommodation concerns.

Day-to-day maintenance work in boarding houses is generally promptly undertaken, however, it was reported by both boarders and staff, that one heating problem had taken a considerable period of time to resolve. At the time of inspection, the boarding accommodation was appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, and suitably furnished and maintained. However, the one exception was the poor standard of toilet and washing facilities located on the first floor of the Wills East boarding house.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The school provides parents, boarders and staff with clear information about boarding principles and practice. The school prospectus, a DVD produced by staff and boarders, and the information available on the school website provide comprehensive information about how the school and boarding houses operate. Furthermore, each boarding house has written their own handbook, giving parents and pupils a real sense of the character of each house from the unique style of writing and the information contained therein. Parents and boarders have found the information very useful; for example, one parent said, 'the introduction booklet sent to new pupils and parents is excellent; it is informative and the right level for pupils'. One boarder commented during the inspection, 'I found the information really good; things like do I need to bring my own duvet cover'.

There is strong leadership and management within the school and boarding houses. The headmaster is supported by the governors who take an active part in visiting boarding houses to monitor the standard of boarding provision. Key boarding issues identified from senior management team, senior pastoral team and boarding house meetings are communicated to the governors at various governing body sub-committee meetings. Communication at operational level within the school and boarding provision is excellent, evidencing clear systems and the recognition of key roles, responsibilities and accountabilities in promoting pupils' welfare. One governor focuses on child protection issues within the school and is vigilant in liaising with the

school's child protection designated person to monitor any safeguarding concerns. The good quality of risk assessments and the regular monitoring of records by senior staff contribute to safeguarding boarders' welfare. The head of boarding and the houseparents have a good level of experience and training in the management and practice of boarding to ensure the boarders' well-being. Many parents commented on the good standard of care provided to their children. Their comments included, 'the pastoral care from the house-parents is excellent and the house-parents and the boarding team are highly respected by the boarders'; and, 'the boarding house is a secure home with positive monitoring and mentoring from the boarding staff'.

All staff working in boarding, complete induction and foundation training in core areas. Staff have access to detailed guidance held within the Staff Handbook which supports them in effectively undertaking their boarding duties. Staff are also able to access external training opportunities, for example, attend child protection courses and training provided within the Boarding School Association framework. Staffing levels within boarding provide adequate levels of supervision both during the day and at night. Staff work on a rota basis and boarders are at all times under the responsibility of an identified member of staff, with on-call back up available at all times if required. Regular house meetings and supervision from houseparents underpin sound care practices within each boarding house and ensure that boarders are looked after in the best way to meet their individual needs. All house-parents are very flexible in their availability to respond to boarders' needs. One boarder summarised this in their comment, 'I commend the house-parents and tutors who have a 24 hour open door policy and really are the best set of tutors! I always feel there is somebody to turn to at school, whatever the situation'.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school operates an equal opportunities policy and respects and welcomes a diversity of backgrounds and cultures, nationalities and religious beliefs. The school's ethos is successfully delivered, promoting a sense of being valued in boarders. There is no major discrepancy of quality of boarding provision for different genders, although some girls considered that the boys' houses provided more recreational facilities. The rolling refurbishment programme and investment in boarding provision contributes to the houses being upgraded in effort to provide a similar standard of accommodation in each house. The boarding houses are organised to provide appropriate protection and separation of boarders by age and gender. The Weirfield annexe accommodates only sixth form boarders and within all boarding houses, adjacent accommodation is provided for each year group. However, a notable feature of Taunton Senior School is the success of vertical boarding. Boarders of all age groups are at ease with each other and mix comfortably together during their free time spent in the houses. Comments from two parents highlighted this aspect; they said, 'the school encourages a friendly environment, with emphasis on respect for others and teaching self-reliance' and, 'there are exceptional relationships between staff and pupils and different year groups within the boarding house'.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Statutory requirements**

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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## Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure boarders keeping and administering their own medication are able to store any medication requiring refrigeration safely and appropriately [breach of national minimum standard 15]
- ensure the school's system for recruiting staff includes all of the points raised in this standard and can be verified from recruitment records [breach of national minimum standard 38]
- provide adequate toilet and washing facilities on the first floor of Wills East boarding house [breach of national minimum standard 44]