

# Taunton's College

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 130707

**Name of lead inspector:** Nigel Fletcher HMI

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**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

**Address:** Hill Lane  
Southampton  
Hampshire  
SO15 5RL

**Telephone number:** 023 805 11811

## Information about the provider

1. Taunton's College is a medium-sized sixth form college (SFC) serving learners living in the west of Southampton. There are several other sixth form colleges and general further education colleges in the area and learners have a wide choice of where to study. Southampton, a unitary authority, has a population of nearly 240,000. Unemployment, at around 7.5%, is above the regional rate and around the national rate. When compared to the national rate a higher proportion of residents are economically inactive. Southampton is in the bottom third of local authorities on the index of relative deprivation. Around a third of students are from minority ethnic groups, which is higher than for the population of Southampton.
2. The college offers courses in 11 of the 15 subject areas. Provision is available from entry to advanced level. In 2010/11 there were around 1,400 students enrolled. The vast majority of the college's students were full time, aged 16 to 18 and funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). Most were taking advanced-level courses. In 2010, the proportion of school leavers in Southampton with five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was 47.5% compared with the national average of 55.2%. The inspection took account of all of the provision offered by the college. The team inspected in-depth the provision in science, performing arts, English and modern foreign languages and business studies.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
<b>Provision for young learners:</b> 14 to 16  Further education (age 16 to 18 years)	2 part-time learners  2 part-time learners 1,304 full-time learners
<b>Provision for adult learners:</b> Further education (19+)	53 full-time learners 16 part-time learners
<b>Employer provision:</b> Train to Gain	27 learners

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
<b>Subject Areas</b>	
Science	3
Performing arts	3
English and modern foreign languages	3
Business and law	3

## Overall effectiveness

3. Taunton's is a satisfactory, but improving, college. It has recently taken significant steps to rectify issues identified by a thorough self-assessment, but there has been insufficient time for these actions to be reflected fully in students' outcomes which remain satisfactory. Nevertheless, improvements can already be seen and the college demonstrates a good capacity to improve. Senior leaders are fully aware of the areas for development required for the college to realise its ambition to be outstanding. Leaders and managers are developing a culture in which all staff assume responsibility for the success of their students. They also recognise that they must maintain a relentless focus on improvement to ensure that all staff and students understand the importance of their individual roles in the pursuit of excellence. Although the quality of self-assessment is improving at course level, insufficient emphasis is given to the role of teaching and learning and course management to improve students' progress. Action and improvement plans arising from course reviews and lesson observations are insufficiently rigorous or focused on key areas for improvement.

4. Students feel very safe, reflecting the secure and harmonious environment in which many students thrive. They benefit from a wide range of courses to suit their needs in most subject areas, and speak highly of the good support they receive from all staff in the college. Most students participate in an excellent choice of enrichment activities designed to maintain their enjoyment of college life and to support their learning. The majority of lessons offer students a wide range of activities which challenge and motivate them. However, the college is aware that it needs to do more with teachers to improve techniques to support students' learning and assessment. Pockets of outstanding practice were observed by inspectors, but managers do not capitalise on these by sharing good practice sufficiently within the departments or across the college.

## Main findings

- The proportion of students who complete their courses successfully has improved since the previous inspection, but is still below the sixth form college national average. Success rates are above national averages on vocational courses, but are low on AS-level courses; they are around average for A levels. Although students' achievements overall improved in the last year, the number completing their courses declined.
- The progress that students make in relation to their starting points has improved over the past two years and is satisfactory. However, this varies across A- and AS-level courses, and in too many subjects students do not make the progress expected of them. Students on vocational courses make very good progress.
- Students enjoy college life and feel very safe in the college. They make a good contribution to the local community. There are no significant differences in performance between students grouped according to their gender or ethnic heritage. Students identified as requiring additional learning support achieve at least as well as other students.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about their subjects. They cultivate a warm rapport with students and have high expectations. College lesson observations are evaluative and frequently perceptive; but areas for improvement arising from them are not always articulated sufficiently coherently.
- High-quality learning resources are used to stimulate and check students' learning. Students make good use of their time in lessons, work well together and enjoy their learning. However, in less effective lessons, learning activities revolve too much around the teacher, with insufficient opportunities for independent student activities; the level of challenge is not geared sufficiently to the needs of all students.
- Supervised study time provides a structured and supportive environment in which students pursue independent study. Completion of work by students is monitored carefully. However, academic targets set by teachers and tutors to help students improve their performance and fulfil their potential often lack clarity; their use is not sufficiently focused to drive up levels of students' progress.

- The college's curriculum meets the needs and interests of students well. A wide range of advanced-level courses is complemented by a thoughtfully planned and growing vocational curriculum at foundation and intermediate levels. This is underpinned by the development of literacy and work skills and provides students with flexible options and coherent progression opportunities.
- Opportunities for, and participation in, enrichment activities are outstanding. Most students benefit from an extensive and innovative variety of activities that develops their specialist interests and skills and supports academic and vocational development.
- Strategic partnerships are very good. The college plays a leading role in the planning and development of 14 to 19 education in Southampton. However, partnerships with the business community, which provide tangible outcomes and work experience opportunities for students are underdeveloped.
- Initial advice and guidance are good and students' additional support needs are identified effectively and met promptly. Tutors monitor students' progress well and provide good support for the development of independent learning skills. Arrangements to set targets and share information about students in receipt of additional learning support are underdeveloped.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, improvement has been too slow and uneven. However, college leaders are now taking purposeful and effective action to bring about rapid change. Measures to raise the expectations of both students and staff are having an impact and have started to drive up standards in all aspects of the college's work, although much is yet to be done to ensure consistently high standards.
- Effective teamwork between senior leaders and curriculum managers, supported by highly effective support managers, is beginning to transform the culture of the college into one where the potential of all staff is realised, and a systematic and comprehensive strategy to raise standards is developing well.
- The college knows itself well. Self-assessment is accurate and self-critical. The use of data to analyse performance and plan for improvement is much improved. However, further training is needed to ensure that the causes of underperformance at course level are identified accurately and tackled swiftly.

### **What does Taunton's College need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that students' learning is improved through providing training to teachers in assessment for learning techniques to promote independent learning activities in lessons and more productive feedback to students on their work.
- Increase the impact of internal lesson observations on improving teaching and learning by sharpening the focus of feedback on key areas for development.
- Ensure the rigour and consistency of target setting so that all students are set targets that are clear and precise and enable them to make faster progress.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels continue to be highly visible and unrelenting in their focus on raising standards and expectations in every aspect

of college life, and that all staff and students recognise that it is in all of their interests to play their own part in the pursuit of excellence.

- Where individual students or courses are underperforming, improve the impact of self-assessment by ensuring that all staff are trained to recognise the contribution of teaching and course management to such weaker performance. Arising from this, develop tightly-focused improvement plans to improve provision.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What learners like:**

- teachers who are enthusiastic and helpful
- tutors who are supportive and check progress regularly
- the friendly, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere and community ethos
- the safety and good behaviour on campus
- good information and communication technology (ICT) and network facilities
- being encouraged to work hard in lessons
- the enrichment activities, such as gym, cricket and lunchtime clubs
- being treated like adults.

#### **What learners would like to see improved:**

- lessons where information and learning technology (ILT) is used ineffectively.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 2**

5. Since the previous inspection the college has made gradual but discernible improvements in students' outcomes and other key indicators. Senior leaders are rightly frustrated at both the pace, and the unevenness, of this improvement. They, and governors, have responded with greater urgency over the last year to raise standards and develop a culture of high achievement. They are making good progress; staff and students report with virtual unanimity on the palpable change in the expectations placed upon them, and that they are now held to account if standards are not high. Significant staffing changes have strengthened the college's capacity to remedy swiftly areas of weaker performance. Through formal self-assessment and their strong engagement with all aspects of the college, leaders and managers are fully aware of what needs to improve and are taking appropriate actions.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 3**

6. Success rates have increased since the previous inspection on the majority of courses, but are still below the most recent national averages for sixth form colleges. Success rates across most subjects improved, significantly for a few; but too many subjects have rates that are still below the high national averages. Success rates on advanced-level courses increased since the previous inspection and are satisfactory; they are high for the small number of adults. Overall rates for A-level courses are at national averages for 2009/10, but those for AS courses are below average. Retention, achievement and attendance rates for students are satisfactory. The standard of students' work observed by inspectors was generally good.
7. The achievement of high grades at GCSE are around national averages, but vary by subject. The proportion of high grades at advanced level is lower than the national average. However, the average attainment of students on entry to the college is also low. Most students make similar progress on AS- and A-level courses to that which would be predicted from their prior attainment. On advanced-level vocational programmes, they make very good progress.
8. Students of minority ethnic heritage generally achieve success rates that are similar to those of other students. However, in 2010/11, female students achieved better success rates compared with males, comparable with the difference nationally. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve at least as well as their peers.
9. Progression between levels, from AS to A levels and to higher education or employment, is satisfactory. Students confirm that they feel very safe in the college and that everyone in the college is treated with respect. They enjoy college life and their studies. Students make a good contribution to the community and several work creatively with local primary schools, for example in mathematics, English, performing arts and sports.

## The quality of provision

## Grade 2

10. Teaching and learning are good, and improving. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subjects. They cultivate a warm, supportive rapport with students that stimulates learning and enables students to express themselves with confidence. Lessons are planned well and most include a range of activities to keep students interested. Students are attentive, make good use of their time, work very well together and treat each other with respect.
11. Teachers have developed good questioning techniques to check learning. They ensure that all students are involved, and skilfully draw out contributions until learning objectives are met. Too often, however, whole-class teaching dominates lessons and leaves insufficient time for independent and collaborative learning. In such lessons, learning is unplanned and disorganised and students are not stretched and challenged sufficiently.
12. A comprehensive lesson observation scheme has identified accurately several areas of teaching and learning practice which need to be improved, and these have been successfully tackled in the last year. College observation grades are consistent with those on this inspection. However, written observation reports focus too much on teachers' and students' activities and not enough on how much students learn and make progress. Advice for teachers on how to improve learning is fragmentary and lacks a coherent vision.
13. Teachers on a few courses integrate equality and diversity themes well into the curriculum. In one physical education (PE) lesson, for example, students compared and contrasted the motivation of male and female sports persons, and discussed the issues facing gay rugby players. However, too many teachers miss opportunities to raise and promote diversity in lessons.
14. Teachers set frequent and regular homework. The weekly 'prep' tutorial provides a useful bridge to independent learning for many students. However, the quality of feedback on work, with advice on how to improve standards, is not consistently good across all courses. Tutors set termly academic targets with their tutees, but targets are often too anodyne to support improvement in progress.
15. Learning accommodation is suitable and most classrooms are adorned with students' work and other inspiring materials. Learning resources are good, including a fast and well-used ICT infrastructure. Teachers often use technology to enliven learning, but a dull diet of too many slideshows is resented by students in a minority of courses. Students value the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) as a vehicle for course and assessment information as well as containing a good range of learning and extension materials.
16. The college meets the needs and interests of students well. A wide range of advanced-level courses, together with a strategically revised and growing vocational curriculum at foundation and intermediate levels, is underpinned by the development of literacy and work skills. Vocational courses at foundation



and intermediate levels complement academic provision and provide flexible options and coherent progression opportunities.

17. An outstanding range of innovative enrichment opportunities enables students to develop their specialist interests and skills and provides support for their academic and vocational development. Support for gifted and talented students is very good with many able to take advantage of specialist development opportunities in sport, music and science. However, the extent and availability of industry links and work experience for vocational students are underdeveloped.
18. Students value the good pre- and post-enrolment initial advice and guidance and the transition activities which support their progression from intermediate to advanced level. Staff identify additional support needs early, ensuring they are met promptly. However, target setting for improvement in student support plans is often vague and imprecise and staff miss opportunities to maximise links with the curriculum to improve student progress.
19. The revised tutorial system effectively combines pastoral support with good tracking of students' academic progress. Students value highly the help and support in their skill development provided by tutors during one-to-one tutorials.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 3**

20. Leaders, managers and governors share a common determination and ambition to raise standards and improve students' outcomes, and recent actions to secure improvement are well considered. A restructuring of middle management designed to improve both efficiency and accountability was particularly well managed. Leaders and managers at all levels are making significant progress in establishing a culture that raises the expectations of both student and staff performance; this has brought a renewed purposefulness to the college, and improvement is well under way. The new structure has promoted the development of a college-wide focus on ensuring that all students' progress, attendance and homework are monitored frequently and consistently. However, these developments are yet to have sufficient impact on students' performance and on standards in the subject areas inspected, which remain satisfactory.
21. Governors are highly knowledgeable about most aspects of the college's performance, and exercise a judicious balance of support and challenge to senior leaders. The considerable educational expertise within the governing body is used to good effect to ask managers pertinent questions about students' performance. Governors fulfil all their statutory duties and provide diligent oversight of the college's finances. Despite these strengths, governors recognise that they have yet to secure sufficient improvement in the college's educational performance to meet the targets they have set.
22. The college's self-assessment report presents a credible and evaluative account of the quality of provision. A wide range of data is used to good effect to make considered judgements of strengths and areas for improvement. At course level,

- self-evaluation is being strengthened and data are being used more effectively to hold teachers to account for the performance of their students. However, more needs to be done to ensure that teachers can evaluate the impact of both teaching and course management on students' performance. In some instances, staff remain too ready to attribute underachievement to students' characteristics rather than to reflect on their own responsibilities. Evaluations of lessons do not always capture precisely the impact of teaching strategies on students' learning.
23. Curriculum managers have a clear grasp of what needs to be done to bring about a swift and significant improvement in students' outcomes. However, it has yet to be ascertained whether performance management will be sufficiently effective to ensure that all teachers fulfil their responsibilities effectively.
  24. Managers fulfil their responsibilities for safeguarding young and vulnerable people well. Arrangements for keeping appropriate safeguarding records of staff are exemplary. Campus wardens make a significant contribution to keeping the college site safe and harmonious. Staff are trained appropriately to recognise potential safeguarding issues and to refer them to the relevant person.
  25. The college places a strong emphasis on celebrating its social and cultural diversity, and promoting tolerance and respect. Policies and procedures to ensure equality of opportunity are comprehensive and reviewed regularly. The college's work on countering homophobic attitudes is particularly noteworthy. Although comprehensive information is available on the performance of different groups of students, data are not always used effectively to analyse the precise reasons for variations in retention, achievement, progress or attendance rates. Self-evaluation of equality and diversity issues at course level is often descriptive and superficial. Internal lesson observations rarely report on practice in promoting equality and diversity.
  26. Students' views on all aspect of the college's provision are listened to carefully, and responded to appropriately. The Principal's frequent meetings with groups of students set an example, and senior leaders and managers are highly visible around the college. Where students' concerns are justified, the college acts swiftly; where managers do not think students' wishes should be met, they explain carefully why this is the case. Although students' views about their courses are gathered in several ways, these rarely feature explicitly in self-assessment.
  27. The resources available to students are well managed. Teachers are well qualified and money spent on staff development is invested effectively. Investment in the college estate has been prudent and effective. The college's finances are particularly well managed, with difficult budgetary decisions being made to minimise any impact on students' experiences.

## Subject areas

### Science

### Grade 3

#### Context

28. At the time of inspection, 483 students took science courses, all studying full time and mainly aged 16 to 18. The main courses offered are GCSE core and additional science and AS and A levels in biology, chemistry, physics and applied science. Some 56% of students are male and 15% are of minority ethnic heritage.

#### Key findings

- Students' outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates are too variable; they are high and above the national averages for A-level biology and chemistry, but low for AS-level biology and physics. Overall, there is a trend of improvement that is particularly evident when value-added data are analysed. Students' progress is satisfactory based on their previous attainment.
- The proportion of high grade passes is low in all science subjects. In a few lessons, more able students are not fully challenged or guided on how to achieve their maximum potential in examinations. The progression of students to higher education is satisfactory. In 2010/11, 74% of A-level students were successful in their applications to university.
- Standards of work in lessons are satisfactory. Students display competent levels of scientific understanding. A strong focus is given to health and safety issues during practical laboratory lessons. Students work well together, enjoy their studies and feel safe, creating a strong community ethos.
- Teaching and learning have improved and are now good with some outstanding features. Teachers are well qualified and have good subject knowledge. They stimulate students to think for themselves through careful questioning.
- The best lessons use a broad range of learning and assessment strategies, including mini whiteboards, traffic-light flash cards and role play to encourage active learning. Teachers use a variety of approaches including individual, peer, and group work to stimulate students. ILT is used well to consolidate and enhance learning.
- Lessons that are no better than satisfactory are characterised by a slow pace of teaching that does not involve students sufficiently in their learning. Class profiles of students' abilities are not always used well to plan tasks to meet the needs of individual students. All students tend to receive the same activity, without any regard to their ability.
- The assessment of students' work is satisfactory. Many teachers give clear comments on how students could improve their work and make better progress. Most teachers monitor students' progress regularly on charts and set specific targets for improvement, although not all teachers provide sufficiently explicit targets. Some students joining AS courses are insufficiently prepared for the standard of work.

- Effective partnerships with a local university enable students to experience additional learning sessions in a higher educational setting. The range of science courses is narrow but meets the demand from students.
- Students appreciate the good support they receive from teaching staff and tutors. The virtual learning environment is used effectively and consistently throughout the department. Systematic procedures are used to ensure teaching staff can inform tutors on the students' progress on personal learning plans which are discussed during tutorials.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new management team has worked well with staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning and promote high expectations among students and staff. Course team meetings are held regularly and agreed actions are followed through. Progress has been made to tackle the areas for improvement identified, but it is too early to have made enough impact to raise standards.
- The self-assessment report identifies key strengths and weaknesses accurately, but actions for improvement are not sufficiently precise. Course reviews are not always sufficiently self-critical and do not focus sufficiently on students' outcomes or the impact on students' progress. Staff listen carefully and respond to the views of students.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff ensure that learning materials do not contain any stereotypical content. Teachers promote equal opportunities in a positive manner.

### **What does Taunton's College need to do to improve further?**

- Agree specific and measurable individual improvement targets with all students in order to improve outcomes.
- Increase the proportion of high grade passes in GCSE and advanced-level subjects by ensuring that more able students are fully challenged and stretched and better prepared for their examinations.
- Extend the sharing of good practice across the department and use student profiles more effectively to meet the needs of individual students in lessons in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Ensure that students joining AS courses are prepared more fully for the standard of work by providing appropriate additional study skills and subject specific support which are consistent with their needs.
- Ensure that self-assessment judgements are rigorous, self-critical and focused on students' outcomes and progress.

## Performing arts

## Grade 3

### Context

29. The college offers A and AS levels and vocational courses from foundation to advanced levels in music, drama and dance. All students study full time, with 203 students being aged 16 to 18 years and 4 students aged 19 years. Over 80% of students study at advanced level, with the remainder on vocational courses at foundation and intermediate levels.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates on A-level music and music technology courses are consistently very high and are above national averages; the majority of students achieve grades which are higher than expected from their starting points. The success rate for the intermediate music course is high, but rates on advanced vocational music courses are lower than average.
- Success rates on A-level dance and drama courses are low and declining, and rates for vocational performing arts courses vary. The majority of students on these courses achieve grades which are at, or just below, those predicted from their prior attainment.
- Students' work is often of a high standard. In music technology, work is highly original and students confidently explore and experiment with genre and sound. In popular music, students explore different musical styles and excel in ensemble activities. In dance, students perform complex choreography and develop performance style and technique. Drama students analyse challenging plays and successfully transfer theory into their performances.
- Most students progress to higher education and employment and a good number of students gain places at prestigious music schools. Students feel safe. Health and safety practices are followed carefully in practical sessions. Attendance is satisfactory. However, in too many lessons students arrive late and disrupt the start of lessons.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are passionate about their subjects and have expert vocational knowledge. They convey this successfully to the students to raise standards of practical work. Students are consistently stretched and challenged in lessons and they make good progress. Effective use is made of peer review and group work to enliven lessons and to create positive relationships.
- In a minority of lessons students are not required to make notes to record what they have learnt; the use of questioning by teachers is sometimes ineffective in engaging all students in discussion and this leads to some missed opportunities for shared learning.
- Assessment practice is good. Homework is set on a regular basis and students often work independently to develop their subject knowledge further. The college's virtual learning environment is used effectively to support assessment.

- The range of provision is good and newly-introduced intermediate- and foundation-level courses meet the needs of a wider range of ability levels. Partnerships are good. Students have good opportunities to experience professional practice through strong links with the local university and external performance venues. Resources to support learning are excellent. Rehearsal and practice facilities are plentiful and well equipped. Information technology is widely available in classrooms.
- Enrichment opportunities are excellent and lunchtime clubs, such as music theory and a choir, enhance students' attainment through the development of additional skills and knowledge. Students mentor pupils in local schools, providing instruction and support for activities such as recording songs and staging performances.
- Guidance and support are good. Students are positive about the easy access they have to teachers and tutors and they value the friendly and supportive atmosphere in the college. Students are positive about the tutorial programme and say that it also helps enhance the quality of their work and their progression prospects. Students rightly say that courses are well organised and that they receive regular and useful information relating to their studies.
- Leadership and management are good. Leaders have clearly communicated their vision to raise standards across the subject area; this is evident in the teaching and learning and in the high quality of students' work.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learning materials promote multiculturalism positively and the music and performing arts staff and students take a lead role in relevant cross-college events.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement are satisfactory. Poor outcomes for students persist on too many courses. Leaders have implemented a range of initiatives to improve those courses where success rates are low, but it is too early to assess the impact of these measures.

### **What does Taunton's College need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that students record key information and learning points consistently in lessons in order to have suitable resources from which to revise their knowledge and understanding and to raise their levels of attainment.
- Ensure that staff work relentlessly in applying stringent procedures consistently throughout the department to improve students' attendance and punctuality to lessons. Use the reasons for absences to inform actions to improve the retention of students and hence their success.
- Identify and intervene promptly to support any students performing below minimum academic or behavioural performance levels in order to improve students' outcomes and progress.

## English and modern foreign languages

## Grade 3

### Context

30. Just over 500 students, mostly aged 16 to 18, study English and modern foreign languages at the college. Advanced-level courses are offered in English language and English literature, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Polish. Over 200 students each year study GCSE English. Additional opportunities are available for students to undertake qualifications in community languages, although the take up of this is low.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory overall but vary between English and modern foreign languages (MFL). Success rates for English A level and high grade passes for GCSE English are on or slightly below national averages, and significantly below for AS English literature and language. However, the success rates for MFL courses have been consistently above the national averages over a three year period.
- Most students make satisfactory progress from their starting points and good progress in many lessons. The percentage of students achieving high grades is high for MFL, but low across the provision for English with no sustained improvement.
- The standard of students' work is good and written work shows that students are developing subject terminology and analytical skills appropriate to their level of study. In English text analysis, skills are highly developed. In MFL, students develop good speaking skills through consistent use of the target language in lessons.
- Teaching and learning have improved and are now good. Teachers provide a range of opportunities to extend and develop students' skills. Students value the fact that lessons offer opportunities that go beyond the requirements of the curriculum. In outstanding lessons, students develop analytical skills at a high level and have many opportunities to explore themes in depth. However, in too many lessons, insufficient attention is paid to meeting the needs of all students.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this effectively to extend and develop students' skills. In MFL, teachers link topics and linguistic structures well so that students are able to engage in realistic language tasks that extend their fluency. In English, historical texts are explored thematically and made relevant to students.
- Assessment is satisfactory. In the weaker lessons teachers rely too much on ineffective whole-class question and answer to assess progress. Students are not encouraged to participate and their progress is not monitored. Assessment of work is timely and feedback is encouraging but does not always provide guidance for improvement.
- The range of provision is good. Students can study a range of languages, including community languages, and progression routes are clear to students.

In lessons and tutorials, students consider the relevance of their studies to their personal and career goals.

- Enrichment activities are good in MFL. Thirty students in total took part in language exchanges in 2010/11. The experience was valued by students and significant impact is evident in the improvement in grades for speaking assessment for those students who took part.
- Support and guidance for students are good. Students comment that they have been well advised prior to joining a course. Support for students' academic attainment has improved due to a more consistent approach to tutorial activity in the area.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. A new management structure and a new course review system have improved teachers' accountability for the achievement of their students and for setting targets for improvement. However, these changes have not yet provided sustained impact on students' attainment and progress.
- The promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory. In lessons good attention is paid to challenging stereotypes. Course teams are starting to use data to monitor and analyse the success of different groups of students. However, actions to address differences in attainment by different groups have not yet been implemented.

### **What does Taunton's College need to do to improve further?**

- Develop the use of better in-class assessment strategies and tasks that provide more stretch and challenge to students more consistently in all lessons in order to improve learning.
- Ensure that students make good progress in relation to their starting points by planning more effectively for students of different levels and providing appropriate feedback that gives effective guidance on how to improve.
- Share good practice in teaching and learning across the department to reduce the variance in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Make more effective use of data in self-assessment to set and monitor targets designed to improve students' outcomes and articulate clear and precise actions to ensure that all targets are met.



## Business and law

## Grade 3

### Context

31. The college offers full-time courses in business and law from foundation to advanced levels. Almost all of the 220 students are aged 16 to 18. Most are taking GCE AS- and A-level courses in accounting, business studies and law. Around 90 students take vocational courses in business offered from foundation to advanced level and a further 48 take an intermediate vocational course in law.

### Key findings

- Success rates are low and below national averages on most courses, except for AS accounting in which they are high. Most students who complete courses at intermediate level achieve their qualification. However, too many leave early. Achievement of high grades in GCE courses is below national averages except for AS accounting and AS law. On the Extended Diploma in Business achievement of high grades is satisfactory.
- Students enjoy their learning and make satisfactory progress at the level to be expected at this stage on their programmes. For example, students on AS courses develop good skills in essay planning, writing and critical thinking in preparation for examinations.
- Progression rates for students from AS to A2 for those students who pass AS are good. Over 85% of A-level students progress to higher education. Progression from foundation and intermediate levels to higher level courses for those who complete their courses is satisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers consistently make use of targeted open questions to check learning. Starter activities are used well in lessons to ensure that learning starts quickly and recaps prior learning. Students are responsive and behave well. However, too many lessons are teacher directed and do not provide sufficient challenge for individual students.
- Schemes of work have been reviewed to include more regular assessment and varied learning activities. Teachers' use of ICT in lessons is satisfactory. However, examples of good practice include using Google Earth to investigate local business types and video clips in some lessons to illustrate topics.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Recently, managers have reviewed assessment planning to ensure that teachers plan for, and set, regular homework and provide quick and effective feedback. Written feedback on most assessed work is constructive but does not always provide clear points for improvement. Teachers demonstrate good practice in A-level law, for example, with students developing their own action plans drawn from feedback on assessed work.
- The college has satisfactory links with schools and universities. In law, several students benefit from the Pathways to Law programme with Southampton University. Students on vocational programmes gain good work experience through placements with local companies.

- Guidance and support are satisfactory. Tutorials are used well to ensure that students understand, and are up to date with, their assessments. In-class learning support is effective and promotes inclusive learning. Target setting for students is insufficiently developed, particularly in terms of individual academic targets through tutorials. Targets are not sufficiently specific or time bound.
- Initial advice and guidance have recently improved and are now satisfactory. Prospective students enjoy open evenings and taster days, and undertake interviews with specialist subject tutors. Further introductory days confirm choices and provide further opportunities for discussion with subject specialists.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent changes have led to new managers concentrating efforts on improving student outcomes. For example, teachers are now accountable for the performance of their students. However, the impact of these changes on outcomes is not yet evident. Teaching staff are well supported and value having responsibility for their tutor groups, who are now benefiting from the closer monitoring.
- Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. All staff are involved in detailed course reviews and have access to full and accurate data on student retention and achievement. The resulting action plan sets appropriate targets but is not yet fully implemented. Arrangements for monitoring students' progress are much improved and teachers are able to take action against underperformance at an early stage.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Students treat each other with respect. In law, teachers challenge stereotypes in lessons and teaching teams incorporate equality and diversity themes into their schemes of work. At intermediate level, lessons are carefully planned to ensure inclusiveness for students of all abilities and also for those who do not have English as their first language.

### **What does Taunton's College need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that the progress of students at risk of underperforming is monitored regularly and interventions are made quickly and effectively. Ensure that students receive specific timed and measurable short-term targets to help them achieve.
- Raise the standards of learning by ensuring that a wider range of learning strategies and activities, closely matched to students' abilities, challenge all students to achieve their full potential.
- Ensure that departmental and course teams monitor the impact of quality improvement plans through regular checking and updating of the action plan in order to raise the quality of provision.

## Information about the inspection

32. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the college's deputy principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
33. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of students. They also looked at questionnaires students had recently completed for the provider. They observed lessons, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**

**Taunton's College**

**Learning types: 14 – 16:** Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>			
Full-time learners	1,250	1,203	47
Part-time learners	11	7	4
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2		
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	2		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2		
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>		
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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