

Taunton Academy

Cheddon Road, Taunton, TA2 7QP

Inspection dates 6–7 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Students do not make enough progress, because over time teaching has been too weak, particularly in science and to a lesser extent in mathematics and English.
- The attainment of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is well below that of other students. Although there are recent signs that the gap is closing, the progress made by students eligible for the pupil premium is inadequate.
- Too many lessons are inadequate. Teachers' questioning does not always challenge students and work in lessons is not adjusted to meet fully the needs of students of different abilities.
- In a few lessons, the behaviour of a small minority of students interferes with learning because teaching does not engage students sufficiently and the school's behaviour management policy is not consistently applied.

The school has the following strengths

- Noteworthy improvements have been made to the quality of teaching, behaviour, assessment and governance and, as a result, students' attainment is rising.
- Leaders, particularly at a senior and governing body level, are demonstrating the capacity to improve. They are clear about the issues to be addressed, and as a result, the school is improving strongly.
- Leaders have very quickly established a good sixth form that meets very well the needs of students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons, of which 15 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons, visited tutorial groups and attended an assembly.
- Meetings were held with six groups of students, two members of the governing body, and senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 48 responses to the on-line parents' questionnaire (Parent View) and 47 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised a number of documents, including the academy's own data on students' recent examination results and current progress. Inspectors looked at documents relating to the academy's development, management of the work of staff, training arrangements for teachers and other staff, checks on teaching, students' behaviour and attendance, the safeguarding of students and governance.

Inspection team

Kevin Sheldrick, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Francis Ashworth

Additional Inspector

Shahnaz Masgood

Additional Inspector

Joanne Pike

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- This academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form and has reduced in size since opening in September 2010.
- An above-average proportion of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding provided for students who are known to be eligible for free schools meals, are looked after or are from service families).
- The proportions of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action or school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs are slightly above average.
- The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and of those who speak English as an additional language are well below average.
- The academy's unvalidated GCSE results for 2012 meet the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Last year, a very small minority of students attended full-time alternative education (off site), organised by the local authority.
- The academy came into existence following the merger of two local schools. Years 7 and 8 and the sixth form are educated in the building that previously housed the St Augustine of Canterbury School (south site). Years 9, 10 and 11 are educated in the building that previously accommodated the Ladymead Community School (north site).
- Students who are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are educated in the 'support for learning centre' that is located at the south site.
- The academy is currently operating whilst a major building programme is being undertaken at the north site. From September 2013 the entire academy will be housed in a new building on the same campus and the south site will no longer be used.
- The academy established a sixth form in September 2011.
- In January 2012, an Ofsted monitoring inspection judged the academy to be making satisfactory progress in making improvements.
- Lessons vary in length and are either 50 or 100 minutes long.
- The academy is jointly sponsored by the Bath and Wells Diocese and Somerset Council.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - eradicating any that is inadequate
 - ensuring all lessons include a range of interesting activities that challenge the full ability range
 - including regular reviews of learning in lessons that inspire students to work harder and clarify what is needed to excel
 - including more challenging questioning that requires all students to think more deeply and provide more extended responses
 - ensuring students have the time to respond fully to marking and other feedback
 - ensuring teaching assistants are able to provide effective support to named individuals in

lessons

- ensuring students appreciate how individual lessons relate to their longer term targets
 - ensuring all staff consistently apply the academy’s behaviour management policy.
- Accelerate students’ achievement by:
- enhancing middle leaders’ abilities to evaluate performance in their areas of responsibility, hold staff to account and learn from the good practice that exists in the academy and beyond
 - at all levels within the academy, ensuring the progress made by different groups, particularly those eligible for the pupil premium, is given a higher priority
 - ensuring all improvement plans contain more details of the progress to be made by all groups of students, thereby making the regular checking by the governing body more straightforward
 - developing more interventions for younger students, particularly related to reading, so they learn the skills and knowledge required to succeed in Year 9 and onwards
 - improving the level of engagement with parents, particularly of those students eligible for support through the pupil premium.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- The year group that took examinations in 2012 entered the school in Year 7 with average levels of attainment. By the end of Year 11, their attainment was below average. They made inadequate progress over time from their starting points.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium attained less well than other students. For instance, 33% of these students obtained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, compared to 55% for other students. Their attainment as shown in their average points scores was much lower than that of other students. This difference was largely because the students eligible for the pupil premium made insufficient progress.
- Currently, students are making better progress because they are experiencing generally better teaching and there are more interventions designed to plug gaps in their learning. These interventions are largely being targeted at students on the borderline of GCSE grades C and D which is boosting the attainment of students, particularly those who are in the middle of the ability range. The interventions are benefiting many students that are eligible for the pupil premium. As a result, the gap between what they achieve and what other students achieve is closing.
- Since the academy opened attainment has improved strongly.
- Students are currently making expected progress in English lessons.
- Better progress is also apparent in mathematics, but there are large gaps in students' previous learning in science, the result of inadequate teaching over time, and this is limiting the students' achievement in the subject.
- Students make consistently expected progress in humanities and better than expected progress in vocational subjects.
- The progress students make in lessons is variable. They make good progress in around half of lessons. In other lessons, they do not make enough progress because of weak teaching.
- The early entry of students into religious education and mathematics GCSEs has improved the attainment of more-able students because they are able to undertake more challenging courses in these subjects. The academy no longer enters middle ability students early for GCSEs because the strategy prevented some from achieving the highest possible grade.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action are educated in mainstream lessons. They make inadequate progress because lessons are not sufficiently adapted to meet their needs and they do not experience sufficient interventions. Students who are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are making good progress because they benefit from being taught in very small groups within the support for learning centre.
- Over time, younger students have not made sufficient progress in their developing their literacy skills, particularly reading, because they have not had bespoke, additional support. In addition, the more effective approach to encouraging reading is currently operating only in Year 9, although plans exist to extend this provision to younger students.
- In the sixth form, students achieve well because they are on highly appropriate courses, experience good teaching and are well cared for.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- In the most effective lessons teachers maintain a brisk pace through the use of praise and regular reviews of learning in which they use emerging examples of good work to clarify how students could excel. In other lessons, particularly longer ones, the pace of learning slows because teachers' strategies to increase the work rate are underdeveloped. For instance, students are not praised sufficiently or held accountable for their work throughout the lesson.

- The most effective teaching results in students being able to concentrate on work at the appropriate level. For instance, in a Year 11 science lesson on nuclear fission, students could choose colour-coded worksheets at different levels. However, too often the whole class undertakes the same tasks in the same way so not all students are challenged.
- Books are usually marked well and areas for improvement are identified but there are times when students are not given the opportunity to respond fully.
- Teachers generally use questions well to ensure students concentrate, for instance randomly identifying students to make responses rather than relying on willing volunteers. At times, however, opportunities are missed to use more probing questioning or paired work to encourage students to make more extended responses or to think more deeply about the subject matter.
- In the better lessons, teachers increase interest levels by linking the subject knowledge to meaningful situations outside of the academy. For instance, in a Year 10 English lesson, the students' motivation to analyse *Romeo and Juliet* was enhanced because of the links made to the modern world.
- Students are aware of their targets and most know what to do to achieve them. There is some uncertainty about the time frame for achieving targets because insufficient attention is given to helping students appreciate the link between what they are achieving in lessons and their long-term targets. A noteworthy exception to this was a Year 8 French lesson in which the teacher took steps to help students understand how their achievement linked to both National Curriculum levels and GCSE criteria.
- Teaching assistants in the support for learning centre offer effective support to disabled students and those who have special educational needs and are supported through school action plus and or through statements of special educational needs. In other lessons there are inconsistencies. Some teaching assistants do not encourage students to be sufficiently independent in their learning and at times they are unable to offer support because the teacher is too dominant.
- In the better lessons, teachers adapt resources well for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Students in Year 9, boys especially, are benefiting from a motivating computer tablet-based approach to reading that rewards them for completing books that are well matched to their reading abilities. The approach taken in younger year groups is a little 'hit and miss' because it is highly dependent on parental support.
- Students appreciate the considerable additional support they receive in preparing for examinations, particularly in Year 11. The academy recognises that it is not intervening early enough currently to ensure all students have the literacy and other skills required to progress well.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well, particularly through assemblies and in humanities lessons. In an outstanding history lesson, students' motivation to learn was greatly enhanced because of the strong empathy developed for the victims of the Holocaust. Students appreciate the opportunities they have to discuss a wider range of issues in religious education lessons and in tutorial time at the start of the day.
- Teaching is good in the sixth form because the courses taught routinely incorporate work at different levels and students take more responsibility for their own learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Behaviour has improved since the opening of the academy. As a result, fewer students are excluded.
- The academy manages effectively the behaviour of a small minority of students who would previously have been excluded.
- Behaviour is well managed by senior staff and by the large majority of teachers. Students said a few teachers do not apply the academy's policies consistently well and inspectors also observed that this was the case.
- As a result of weaknesses in teaching, there are too many occasions when students do not

engage in their learning and a few students misbehave, particularly in lessons involving lower-attaining students.

- Behaviour in the support for learning centre is well managed. The support the students receive in the centre ensures that some are able to participate in mainstream lessons.
- The very large majority of parents and students report that bullying is rare and that when incidents do occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively. This contributes to virtually all students feeling safe in the academy. Students have an impressive awareness of all forms of bullying, including the seriousness of racist and other comments that show prejudice.
- Attendance has improved sharply and is now average. The attendance of most groups that previously did not attend regularly has improved. Attendance is a high priority and the academy has comprehensive and robust arrangements to reduce absences.
- Students attend well in the sixth form and make a positive contribution to the academy as a whole. For instance, they lead sporting activities with younger students and take responsibility for charity events. Sixth formers appreciate the consideration being given to ensuring they can go on to worthwhile courses or apprenticeships.
- Students enjoy working in groups and relish lessons that begin with solving problems linked to real life. Students in the sixth form have extensive opportunities to learn independently, but this aspect is not as well developed with younger students.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Although serious weaknesses remain in teaching and achievement, leaders demonstrate the capacity to improve. Students' behaviour has improved, particularly their attendance. Improvements to teaching and the much better targeting of additional support in Years 10 and 11 to where it is most needed are raising attainment. Since the academy opened, attainment has improved so the government's floor standard has been consistently exceeded. In challenging underperformance in teaching, leaders have the support of the very large majority of staff.
- Senior leaders and the governing body are clear about the priorities to be addressed and have taken the required action. Leaders recognise that there is much more to do, for instance that further action is needed to ensure that the resources available through the pupil premium have a greater impact. In addition, leaders know that levels of engagement with parents are currently not high enough, particularly for the students eligible for pupil premium; only about half of parents attend consultation events.
- To accelerate the pace of improvement, the academy has worked with a range of external consultants to ensure it has the very best advice in a range of areas. Leaders have taken steps to develop partnerships in recognition that some staff do not have sufficient insight into good and outstanding practice beyond the academy. A link with a local independent school has allowed a significant expansion in the courses that are to be made available in the sixth form.
- The local authority provides effective support to the governing body. It has ensured it has access to an independent source of advice so that it is better placed to hold senior leaders to account.
- Leaders are implementing a much more robust approach to the management of the performance of all staff. For instance, the majority of staff did not receive a pay award recently because targets were not reached. Although staff are set challenging targets related to students' progress, these targets do not give sufficient attention to the groups that attain less well.
- Decisive action has been taken where teachers are found to be underperforming. The high levels of accountability are motivating staff to improve. Performance is improving because staff have access to professional development that is matched well to their different needs.
- Middle leaders are generally aware of the weaknesses to be tackled to improve teaching further. However, some lack the confidence to evaluate teaching and hold staff to account for the performance of students. Some do not have sufficient contact with colleagues who have successfully addressed similar weaknesses in the academy and beyond.
- There are strengths in the range of subjects and courses offered. Students experience a suitable

balance of work-related and GCSE courses that are matched well to their needs. More able Year 11 students spoke positively about how they valued the opportunity to take GCSEs early in religious education and mathematics, but middle ability students felt that this sometimes reduced their motivation to study to gain a higher grade.

- The academy's improvement plans address the right issues but there is a lack of detail related to teaching. In addition, the plans do not have sufficient shorter term targets that can be used by governors to check the progress being made.
- The academy is beginning to take appropriate steps to ensure it uses its pupil premium funding more effectively and is identifying specific strategies aimed at this group. Leaders recognise that improvements so far made by these pupils are the result of general improvements to provision rather than specific actions aimed at this group.
- In the sixth form, there is a good awareness of how to improve this provision further, including, for instance, how the range of courses can be expanded to meet more effectively the needs of more students.
- The leadership of the support for learning centre is good.

■ **The governance of the academy:**

- Governors now make appropriate arrangements for the use of pupil premium funding, although they are not fully aware of how the money has been spent in the recent past. They have a strong awareness of how teachers' performance is managed to improve their practice. They ensure that only effective teaching is rewarded by pay and promotion, and know and support the ways in which senior leaders are tackling any remaining underperformance in teaching. Governors set appropriately challenging targets for senior leaders and they recognise that these need to take more account of the groups of students that have progressed less well. Governors are taking appropriate action to ensure they have stronger partnerships with other diocese and local academies. They have recognised the benefits that can be derived through having links with other good and outstanding providers. All governors undertake induction training and many have participated in a range of courses to improve their skills. Members of the governing body are aware of the examination results and what they indicate about the progress students make. They are therefore well placed to hold leaders to account for the academy's performance. Governors ensure that statutory duties, including those for safeguarding students, are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136193
Inspection number	399768

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	676
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Cridge
Principal	Mark Trusson
Telephone number	01823348200
Fax number	01823321450
Email address	sch580@educ.somerset.gov.uk

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