

The Taunton Academy

Cheddon Road, Taunton, Somerset, TA2 7QP

Inspection dates

12–13 June 2014 and 3 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students, especially the most able, disabled students and those with special educational needs, are not making consistently good progress. The proportion of students who are making better than expected progress is below the national average.
- Not all teachers are tackling students' weak literacy skills to help them make better progress.
- Teaching is not consistently meeting the needs, interests and aspirations of all students, especially those with lower starting points and the most able.
- Teachers' marking does not always help students to know precisely what they need to do to improve their work and is not consistently followed up by checking that improvements are made.
- Students' lack of interest results in low-level disruption in a small minority of lessons, usually in lower sets.

The school has the following strengths

- Most students are now making expected progress. The academy's information indicates that the attainment of current Year 11 students has improved and their GCSE results are likely to be above the government's floor standards.
- Students supported by the pupil premium are making better progress than previously and are catching up with others.
- The quality of teaching is improving, with increasing examples of good teaching, due to robust systems for checking students' progress and relevant support and training for staff.
- Students behave well in the majority of lessons and around the academy. They feel safe in school and their attendance is improving.
- The sixth form is good and all students go on to education, employment or training.
- Governors, the Principal, senior and middle leaders have created a positive ethos for learning. Through rigorous systems for checking the school's performance and tackling weaknesses, they are effective in bringing about improvements in all areas of the academy's work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook 27 classroom observations involving 27 different teachers. In addition, short visits were made to 20 lessons. Most of these observations were conducted alongside senior staff.
- Owing to examination commitments, no observations of teaching involving students in Years 11, 12 and 13 were undertaken.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, the academy’s sponsors, the local authority, groups of students, and with many staff, including the Principal, senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors took account of 42 responses to Ofsted’s online Parent View survey and questionnaires completed by 37 members of staff.
- Inspectors looked at samples of students’ past and present work and scrutinised various documents. The documents included the school development plan, the academy’s checks on how well it is performing, information on students’ academic progress, their behaviour, attendance and punctuality, and records relating to the safeguarding of students.
- Inspectors evaluated the impact of additional funding, such as the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding.
- Very occasionally, Ofsted will delay publication of a report to ensure full consideration of concerns identified during the quality assurance process. Very rarely the process may suggest flaws in the inspection evidence base, which will cause Ofsted to conclude that the inspection is incomplete. This happened at Taunton Academy. As a result, Ofsted took action to complete the inspection and organised a further visit to the academy to gather additional information to secure the evidence base. In such cases, the inspection report is not published until Ofsted is satisfied that the inspection is secure.

Inspection team

Bill Stoneman, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Teresa Gilpin	Additional Inspector
Patrick Hazelwood	Additional Inspector
Stephanie Matthews	Additional Inspector
Julia Miriam	Additional Inspector
Sue Frater	Her Majesty’s Inspector
James Sage	Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- This academy, which opened in September 2010, is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and includes a far smaller than average sixth form.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs supported by school action is above average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is similarly above average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average and very few students speak English as an additional language.
- An above average proportion of students are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government to help students known to be eligible for free school meals and who are looked after).
- From a total of 99 Year 7 students, 58 are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding. This is government funding to help students who did not attain the expected Level 4 in reading or mathematics at the end of Year 6 in their primary schools.
- The academy's GCSE results for 2013 did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small minority of students in Key Stage 4 receive part of their education at Somerset Further Education College. These students are all following specialist vocational courses.
- At the time of the last inspection and during the last academic year, the academy functioned on two sites, one of which was undergoing extensive building work. The academy is now located on one site and no building work is currently in progress.
- There have been many staff changes, at all levels, since the previous inspection. Changes have also taken place within the governing body.
- The academy is sponsored by the Bath and Wells Diocese (lead sponsor) and Somerset County Council (co-sponsor).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all students make good progress by ensuring that:
 - the work set fully challenges and supports all students, especially disabled students, those with special educational needs and the most able students
 - students are always given guidance in marking that helps them to know precisely what to do to improve their work, and have enough time to show the improvement
 - all teachers develop students' skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- Raise achievement, especially in English and mathematics.
- Make sure that students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are positive in all lessons, by providing work that meet the interests, needs and aspirations of students, particularly those with lower starting points.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- From their different starting points, the proportions of students exceeding nationally expected rates of progress in English and mathematics are below average. However, the proportions making expected progress have improved and are now broadly in line with the national average.
- Disabled students, those with special educational needs and the most able are not making good progress across year groups and subjects. This is because not all teachers are setting work that fully supports and challenges them.
- Students' learning is held back by weak literacy skills. The academy is making effective use of Year 7 catch-up funding from the government to provide reading programmes which are beginning to improve students' skills. It is also providing appropriate training for staff. However, not all teachers are doing enough to help students to develop skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- Skills in mathematics are developing steadily in mathematics lessons, but are not applied consistently across subjects.
- Students who are supported by the pupil premium are not making as much progress as others. However, the gap between those supported by the pupil premium and their peers is closing because they are given effective support and teaching is improving. In 2013, the gap in English and mathematics was equivalent to one and a half GCSE grades. It is now equivalent to half a GCSE grade. In addition, the school's monitoring information shows progress for students supported by the pupil premium in Year 7 is stronger than that of their peers.
- The academy's information on the progress of current Year 11 students shows they have made better progress than last year's cohort. Their attainment dipped below the government's floor standards. The information indicates that about half of the students will achieve good GCSE results. While this remains below the national average, it is an improvement on the previous year.
- In particular, achievement has improved in English due to recent changes in staffing and more rigorous target setting and checking of progress.
- A small number of the most able students were entered early for some of their GCSE examinations. They were given the opportunity to retake them to improve their grades. The practice of early entry has now been discontinued.
- Students in alternative provision at the local college make good progress in their vocational courses.
- Students in the sixth form all take BTEC vocational qualifications. The academy's records show they make good progress and all secure employment.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is too inconsistent to promote good progress for all students. Inadequate teaching has been tackled effectively.
- Teachers are not consistently providing lessons that challenge and support all students, particularly those with special educational needs and the most able, to achieve well over time.
- Not all teachers give enough attention to developing students' skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- All teachers mark students' work regularly and follow the school's new procedures. However, they are not all giving precise enough guidance to help students to know what to do to improve their work. For example, comments such as 'complete all questions' are too vague. Students are not always given time to respond and teachers are not consistently checking that this has been done.
- Academy leaders have recently introduced a more rigorous system for assessing the progress of all students towards higher targets. This is raising teachers' expectations of what students can

achieve and is beginning to help teachers to match lessons to the different starting points of students in the class, even when the students are grouped in sets by ability.

- The assessment system is proving effective for students who are supported by the pupil premium and these students are making better progress. However, teachers' use of assessment, whilst improving, is uneven across and within subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Some teachers link their expectations clearly to levels or GCSE grades. For example, in a Year 10 religious education lesson, students were very clear about what they needed to do in the lesson to work towards their various target grades. As a result, the students are making good progress over time in religious education. This is not the case in all lessons.
- In some lessons, students all work through the same tasks at the same pace. This slows the rate of progress for the most able because they do not move on to suitably challenging work quickly enough to make good progress. Work is often too challenging for students with special educational needs, who struggle to keep up.
- Following recent training, some teachers are beginning to tackle students' weak literacy skills. For example, in a Year 8 music lesson, the teacher helped students to review the features of African rhythms by giving them a range of words to use and by exploring the meaning of the words with them. The students are making at least expected progress, and many are making good progress, in music.
- Year 8 students were seen to be struggling with their writing in history because they had not talked about ideas or learned words that would help them. In this subject, they are not making good progress over time.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers are skilled at assessing students' different starting points and leading students all to higher levels of understanding. For example, in a Year 10 science lesson on cell structure, the teacher asked the students to reflect on what they had learnt previously. Through questioning at different levels, they were all enabled to make good progress in applying their knowledge to different situations. The teacher's comments in marking their work also helped the students to make further progress.
- All students make rapid progress in drama because the teacher challenges students in lessons and writes questions when marking their work. This encourages students to think and extend their understanding. They are given time to respond to the questions and to show improvements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement because students' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive across subjects and with different staff. Students report that in a small minority of lessons, mainly in some lower sets where teaching does not meet the needs, interests and aspirations of students, progress is hindered by low-level disruption.
- A small minority of parents and students raised concerns about behaviour in some lessons. However, students are confident that behaviour is improving and the school's records confirm this. Inspectors agree that most staff apply the school's procedures for managing behaviour effectively. Students respond very quickly to instructions and requests by staff.
- There are marked improvements in behaviour over time for individuals with particular behavioural needs. For all groups of students, exclusions are now well below the national average for secondary schools.
- In the majority of lessons and around the school at break and lunch time, students behave well. They bring the right equipment to lessons, including hand-held tablets which the school has provided for each of them. They enjoy using these during lessons to research information.
- Leaders and managers have created a positive ethos in and around the academy. Students take pride in their school uniform and the presentation of their work is improving in most lessons.
- Attendance is improving and is now broadly average.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including when using electronic communications. There are few

instances of bullying and these are dealt with effectively by the school.

- Students say they feel safe at school and at alternative provision placements in the college. Risk assessments, including for off-site education, are thorough and appropriate. Most parents agree that their children feel safe in school.

The leadership and management are good

- Under the astute leadership of its Principal, all aspects of the academy's performance are improving. The two former schools have been merged successfully and are now on one site, inadequate teaching has been eradicated, teaching is continuing to improve and systems and procedures are now in place to increase students' progress more rapidly. This is having a positive impact on students' behaviour and attendance.
- The Principal has trained and developed an able and committed team of senior and middle leaders. The leaders' roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and maintain an effective focus on improving teaching and learning.
- The leadership team is establishing effective procedures for checking and improving the academy's work. The systems are of high quality.
- For example, all teachers are involved in regularly checking the levels of progress made by their students from each starting point, using an on-line system. This is raising expectations and aspirations for the students. The teachers follow clear procedures for marking students' work which involve students in assessing each other's work, comments from the teacher and time to respond to these. Both systems are recent and, while teachers are not yet consistently effective in using them, they are beginning to raise achievement for all students.
- Self-evaluation is well organised and accurate. All senior and middle leaders are involved in lesson observations, checking students' work and their academic progress, behaviour and attendance. As a result, the leaders accurately identify the academy's strengths and areas for improvement.
- School development planning is based on clear targets for improvement. This helps the leadership team and governors to check that improvements are being made. The impact of actions is evaluated thoroughly.
- Leaders check the progress of all groups of students, including those supported by the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. They make sure that the funding is used to improve students' performance in English and mathematics. Leaders have rightly identified the need to improve provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs, and the literacy skills of all students. Middle leaders have been appointed to lead the improvements.
- Procedures for the performance management of teachers are based on the achievement of students, and teachers are held to account appropriately for the progress their students make. The procedures identify the training needs of individual staff, which the academy meets. Consequently, teaching is improving.
- Staff morale is high and questionnaires completed by staff are positive. Typical comments include, 'I am proud to be a part of this academy. It has improved significantly.' Staff praise the school's 'improvement journey'.
- The academy's curriculum covers an appropriate range of subjects and makes a good contribution to students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures are developed through studying world festivals and supporting a school in the Gambia.
- The curriculum is reviewed regularly. Provision continues to be made in the local college for those who benefit from vocational courses. The curriculum does not always meet the interests, needs and aspirations of students with lower starting points or lead to a thirst for knowledge.
- The sixth form curriculum meets the students' needs well. Retention rates are good. Students receive effective guidance on courses and careers which result in them all going on to education, employment or training. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good.
- The academy works closely with parents in improving the behaviour and attendance of their

children, and this has a positive impact on the students' achievement. The large majority of parents who responded to the Parent View survey would recommend the school to others.

- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. They are thorough and well managed.
- The sponsors have provided effective support for the academy, including support from an outstanding school. This has led to the introduction of a new marking policy that, where used well, is helping students to improve their work.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is well informed about the academy's strengths and areas for improvement through making regular visits
 - challenges senior leaders and holds them to account for the academy's standards of performance
 - makes sure that students' achievement and the quality of teaching are improving and that the academy fulfils its statutory duties, for example in relation to safeguarding and the performance management of staff
 - ensures the efficient management of financial resources, which leads to the increasingly effective deployment of staff and resources, including government funding.

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
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	441922

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	645
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Cridge
Principal	Mark Trusson
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 February 2013
Telephone number	01823 348200
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