

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



4 December 2017

Mrs J Veal  
Headteacher  
The Taunton Academy  
Cheddon Road  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA2 7QP

Dear Mrs Veal

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Taunton Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 14 November 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in January 2017. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marcia Headon  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2017.**

- Secure and sustain improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, so that outcomes for pupils improve, by ensuring that teachers:
  - share the better practice in the school so that pupils make stronger progress in all subject areas
  - have high expectations of what pupils are capable of, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
  - plan suitably challenging tasks for pupils which address gaps in their reading, writing and mathematical skills
  - expect accurate spelling, punctuation and use of grammar in pupils' written work.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
  - significantly improving attendance for all pupils, especially those who are persistently absent from school, and sustaining good attendance for all groups of pupils
  - insisting that all teachers consistently apply the school's behaviour policies
  - ensuring that more pupils value and take pride in the presentation of their work.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that the initiatives and systems recently implemented to improve the quality of teaching are fully evaluated for their impact on outcomes
  - making sure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are assessed accurately and given support which is appropriate to their needs
  - coordinating initiatives to improve pupils' literacy and communication skills more effectively in key stage 4
  - sharpening middle leaders' analysis of the performance of key groups of pupils in their subject areas so that they can intervene immediately if pupils fall behind.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 14 November 2017**

### **Evidence**

I met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team and governors. I also met with the chief executive officer of the Richard Huish Trust. I made short visits to lessons in several departments. I looked at pupils' books and observed their behaviour around the school. I held discussions with two groups of pupils on their views of the school. I met with middle leaders and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). I considered information about pupils' outcomes, attendance and exclusions. I looked at external reports on the school.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, the school has had extensive staffing changes. Eleven staff have left. This includes the SENCo and the school chaplain. Thirteen new staff have joined. A deputy headteacher, with responsibility for inclusion, has joined the leadership team. He is acting as SENCo until the permanent postholder arrives in January 2018. A new head of faculty for science, and two year leaders have also joined. The number of pupils on roll has increased by over 50.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

The headteacher has continued her relentless drive for improvement. The extended senior leadership team supports her well. The extra leaders have enabled the team to increase its checking of the quality of teaching and learning. The team has introduced a wide range of initiatives to support improvement in the quality of teaching. These are now beginning to bear fruit. The senior team has a good understanding of the current areas for development and is addressing these systematically. The team has continued its careful analysis and tracking of pupils' attainment and progress. This has enabled it to shine the spotlight on areas of underperformance and to take action to remedy these.

The team has recently introduced faculty reviews. These, with the increased frequency of checking the work in classrooms, have ensured that pupils are making better progress. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are rising. The quality of teaching is beginning to improve. The senior team is very clear that work should be challenging and engaging for all pupils. Staff are on board with this and morale is generally good. On occasions, the level of challenge for pupils is not pitched correctly and for a few pupils is either too high or too low. This was more evident in lower-ability groups.

Middle leaders continue to be much clearer about their responsibilities. They show a detailed knowledge of the progress of different groups of pupils and of the quality of teaching in their departments. They are holding teachers to account more effectively and are being very proactive in seeking improvement. The appointment

of the heads of year has helped with behaviour management. They are giving greater support to vulnerable pupils.

Opportunities for sharing good practice in teaching have continued and grown. There are now joint visits to lessons by senior staff and teachers, and a revised meeting schedule. These allow for discussion about teaching methods and spread good practice.

The senior team has addressed the need to reduce the gap in achievement and progress between disadvantaged pupils and those who are not disadvantaged. Following the pupil premium review, the senior team ensured that staff were given more training in how to help individual disadvantaged pupils. This training is ongoing. The amount of support given to these pupils has also increased. Disadvantaged pupils have extra resources. There is far greater engagement with their parents. Staff are now seeking ways to help them further. In the 2017 GCSE outcomes, the gap between the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils did not close significantly. However, the attainment of both groups rose considerably. Currently, the work in books and the most recent performance information show that the gap is now beginning to reduce.

Following the earlier monitoring visit, the headteacher acted quickly to ensure that the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities were considered more thoroughly. The newly appointed deputy headteacher responsible for this has had a significant impact. He has identified these pupils more accurately. He has raised awareness of other pupils who need more help. Extra training has been put in place for staff to enable them to give more effective support. Early indications are that this is beginning to have an impact on the progress of these pupils.

Leaders have recently introduced a new approach to the management of behaviour and rewards. This is having an impact on poor behaviour. The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions has dropped. Pupils welcome the new system and appreciate the rewards. However, they report that there is still some inconsistency in the way in which teachers use the new behaviour system. A small amount of low-level disruption continues in some classes. This is more evident where teaching is less effective. Pupils feel entirely safe in school. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and meet statutory requirements.

The emphasis placed on literacy and communication has had a positive effect. Senior staff check the teaching of literacy in lessons, which helps to identify areas that need improvement. Expectations about the teaching of literacy have been clarified. A learning support assistant is helping with this work. A new reading scheme to help pupils increase their reading age is having an effect. Many pupils now express their meaning much more clearly, both orally and in writing.

Members of the local advisory body have continued to be fully supportive of the school. They understand the progress the school has made and the challenges it still faces. The support of governors, linked to areas of the school's work, such as attendance and SEN and/or disabilities, means they have an in-depth understanding of issues. The local advisory body has been responsive in brokering support through a local teaching school. They have sought and gained additional finance to enable the school to increase its staffing capacity.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Examination outcomes rose significantly for most pupils and groups of pupils in 2017. Overall attainment remains below national figures. However, in some subjects such as science, drama, and religious education, attainment was above national averages. In 2017, the school was totally accurate in its predictions of its outcomes.
- Pupils now have confidence in the school and their attitudes to learning have improved. The vast majority show respect to staff and visitors alike. They enjoy the wide variety of opportunities which are given to them. There is a growing sense of the ethos of the school as a place of which the community should be proud. Pupils' presentation of their work has improved. They are aware of why this is important.
- Engagement with parents and the wider community has increased. The school has raised its profile in the wider community effectively. Pupils appreciate the higher visibility of senior staff around the building and outside the school at the start and the end of the day. Senior staff make sure that they make contact with parents over any issues.
- The quality of teaching and learning is beginning to improve. Teachers have a better understanding of the needs of their pupils. Joint planning within departments, especially in English and mathematics, is helping to ensure that teachers are well supported.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Attendance overall remains below the national level and has dropped this term. It is particularly low in Years 8 and 10. The school has introduced a variety of approaches to address this problem, but they are not yet having enough impact. The attendance of pupils in Year 11 is better than at the same time last year. This area will be a major focus at the next monitoring visit.
- Although pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have been identified, insufficient support is being given to them in class. Strategies to help them make better progress are not yet in place.
- For some pupils, especially in lower-ability sets, the work is not sufficiently matched to their needs. Lessons sometimes contain concepts and words which they do not follow. There is insufficient checking of their understanding. In these

classes there is sometimes not enough support or, where it is provided, it is not effective enough.

### **External support**

The school effectiveness adviser continues to provide good support and evaluation. Her advice is precise and focused on the correct areas. In the absence of a qualified SENCo, the school has had support from other neighbouring schools. The West Country Teaching School Alliance has also provided support through a bid for finance.