

The Taunton Academy

Cheddon Road, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7QP

Inspection dates

25–26 September 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Standards have been too low for a number of years. In 2017, pupils made less progress than in four out of five of schools. Standards are beginning to rise, but further improvement is required.
- Disadvantaged pupils have made particularly poor progress in the past. This group of pupils is now beginning to do better. This is because the support they receive is improving.
- The quality of teaching is too inconsistent. Much of the teaching does not give pupils opportunities to deepen their thinking and gain a depth of understanding in their work.
- The standard of literacy is low on entry and pupils do not catch up quickly enough. This is undermining pupils' progress across all subjects. It is preventing them from expressing themselves as well as they should.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. This is central to why pupils still make less progress than they do in other schools.
- Pupils' progress is slowed because the advice teachers give them on how to improve their work is too vague to be helpful to them.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has improved in all aspects of its work since the last inspection. The obvious energy and passion of the headteacher are driving the school forward. Her work has galvanised teachers and engaged pupils. Parents and carers are vocal in their support of the improvements she has brought about.
- Trustees, governors and leaders understand the school and the community it serves well. This has allowed them to steer improvements effectively.
- Pupils behave well around the school site. They are polite and treat each other well. Relationships between teachers and pupils are strong and positive.
- Pupils are kept safe. Leaders have created a strong culture of care for pupils. Staff make sure that pupils who need extra support receive it so that they can continue to flourish.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They are keen to learn and so are attentive. When they are given challenging work to do, they respond willingly. When they are given work that does not meet their needs they tend to become disengaged but remain compliant.
- Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities well. As a result, these pupils are making better progress than in previous years.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in all subjects by improving standards of literacy.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - setting appropriately high expectations of all pupils so that they can achieve at least similar standards to comparable pupils in other schools
 - developing teachers' skills so that they can routinely plan and deliver learning that challenges pupils to deepen their thinking
 - ensuring that teachers offer pupils precise advice that allows them to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher communicates her commitment to improving the life chances of the pupils with great energy and enthusiasm. She sets a positive tone that resonates across the school. This has underpinned the improvements the school has made since the previous inspection.
- Leaders know the school well. They responded to the previous inspection report with a determination to improve the school, and they are being successful. They understand that further improvement is required before the school can be considered good, but they have made significant progress over the last 18 months.
- Senior leaders have incrementally improved key aspects of school life. They rapidly raised expectations of behaviour across the school. They have more recently been equally effective in addressing poor attendance. They are successful because they take a precise and detailed approach that focuses on the causes of the problem and then seeks to tackle them. They then monitor the impact and refine their approach accordingly.
- Leaders use the pupil premium grant well to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. They identify the barriers pupils face and seek to address them. They are broadening pupils' horizons by ensuring that they have access to a range of out-of-class activities. This gives pupils new cultural experiences that they otherwise might not have. This approach is beginning to enrich the lives of this group of pupils and raise their aspirations for the future.
- Leaders make sure that the curriculum is appropriate for all pupils. There is a good range of GCSE options on offer. Leaders review the curriculum regularly to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of pupils. Currently, few pupils choose to take a foreign language GCSE. However, leaders make sure that the option remains for all pupils to do so.
- There is well-planned and effective provision for careers education and independent advice and guidance. Teachers give pupils a variety of opportunities to explore the career options available to them as they progress through the school. This is giving pupils the information they need and helping them to be more ambitious for their futures. Because of this work, the proportion of pupils continuing in full-time education, employment or training when they complete their GCSEs has risen substantially and is now at the national average.
- Leaders place a strong emphasis on the personal, social and health education (PSHE) aspects of the curriculum. Pupils have good opportunities to debate topical issues and to develop the skills of working with others. Values such as the rule of law and democracy are discussed. As a result, pupils have a well-developed sense of tolerance and respect for others. Pupils also value the broad range of sports and arts clubs and societies. These are well attended, including by disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders are continuing to improve the quality of teaching. However, progress has been slower than in other aspects of the school's work. There is a well-structured programme of training for teachers and this is having some impact. For example, the

headteacher focused training on improving the quality of teaching for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This has significantly improved the progress these pupils make. However, there is not yet the same level of precision and monitoring in the leadership of teaching as there is in the leadership of other aspects, for example behaviour and attendance. This has allowed inconsistencies in the quality of teaching to continue.

- Subject leaders have been at the heart of improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Despite this, they have not yet raised the quality of teaching of all their teachers to that of the best. This is because they are not precise enough in developing teaching skills with their teams.
- The headteacher has made extensive use of consultants, including from the local authority, to advise and to check on progress. This has enhanced her understanding of the school's progress. She has been consistently quick to respond to their advice. This approach has had a positive effect on the school's development.

Governance of the school

- Trustees and governors are very committed to the school and to improving it for the benefit of the children in their community. They have a good understanding of the context and history of the school and use that to ensure that leaders are focused on addressing underachievement.
- There is a good mix of skills on both the trust board and the local governing body. Governors work together well to challenge and support school leaders. They ask pertinent questions of senior and middle leaders and seek further information when they are not satisfied.
- Governors have a secure overview of safeguarding. They check on processes such as recruitment and record-keeping regularly and have a good understanding of the procedures the school operates.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a strong safeguarding climate across the school. Leaders and staff at all levels are committed to keeping pupils safe. Staff are well trained. They understand what to do if a pupil discloses a safeguarding concern to them.
- Teachers and support staff look after vulnerable pupils well. They know pupils as individuals and respond to their differing needs. Staff take the mental health of pupils seriously and support them appropriately. They are also proactive in working with other agencies to counter potential threats to safeguarding in the community.
- Leaders maintain the school's safeguarding systems and records assiduously. Appropriate checks are made on staff before they are allowed to work with pupils. There are appropriate risk assessments in place where necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too inconsistent across the school. Teaching has improved in the last 18 months but there are still too many instances when pupils are not making good progress. Where progress is weak, it is usually because teachers do not have high enough expectations of their pupils.
- Teachers often accept responses from pupils that are too superficial. Pupils realise that little is expected of them at times and so they are content to coast along. Teachers too rarely ask pupils questions that encourage them to think or to deepen their knowledge. On the occasions when they are challenged to consider difficult problems, pupils respond very positively.
- There are examples of good teaching across most departments in the school. These tend to be focused in key stage 4. When teachers do not allow pupils to settle for shallow thinking or are not satisfied with the first answer, pupils are enthused and raise their game. In history, for example, Year 11 pupils are very keen to discuss and debate. In these situations, pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive.
- Leaders have correctly identified low standards of literacy as a barrier to learning and have put a policy in place to address it. However, this is not having the impact leaders desire. As part of the programme, teachers are asked to feed back to pupils about their errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Not all teachers are doing this regularly. As a result, the impact is diluted.
- Teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to develop their ideas and structure their thinking into extended answers. On the occasions that they do, pupils' limited vocabulary and simplistic sentence construction often handicap them.
- Middle leaders and teachers have revised the curriculum they teach across most subjects. This is helping to raise standards. Most, but not all, teachers are subject specialists who know their subjects well. This is enabling them to set pupils work that develops their knowledge and prepares them for their examinations.
- Teachers do not consistently challenge the most able pupils. They are sometimes set targets that do not stretch them. These pupils are keen to do well but they are not given enough opportunities to excel.
- The quality of teaching of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is good. Leaders have strengthened the leadership of the SEN department and this has had an immediate impact. Teachers understand these pupils' needs, and teaching assistants are deployed effectively. This group of pupils is also given additional support with their literacy where required. Consequently, they are beginning to make better progress.
- Teachers often give pupils advice on how to improve their work. Pupils are keen to respond. However, their progress is slowed because often the advice is too vague to be helpful. Some departments, for example mathematics, are more successful at pinpointing where errors lie, and pupils improve their understanding as a result.
- Teachers and pupils enjoy positive relationships. Teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of pupils well. When teaching is at its best, teachers use that knowledge to stretch pupils where they can and to support them when necessary.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is good.
- Leaders have ensured that there is a high quality of support for pupils' personal welfare. Pastoral leaders and teachers know their pupils well and respond quickly to any additional needs they may have. Parents are very confident that when they contact the school they will be listened to and staff will act to support their children.
- A significant proportion of pupils join the school with low or fragile self-esteem. Pastoral staff and teachers take great pains to support these pupils and gradually bolster their self-confidence.
- Pupils are increasingly proud of their school. They are also proud of themselves and the work they do. They take care in the presentation of their books, and work is rarely left incomplete.
- Pupils are aware of different kinds of bullying, including racist, homophobic and transphobic. They say that bullying is rare and they have confidence in the staff's ability to deal with it.
- Pupils are taught to deal with risks in and out of school through assemblies and PSHE sessions. Pupils also know how to stay safe online.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good. They are keen to answer questions and get involved in activities. Sometimes, however, when the quality of teaching is weaker, they lose their enthusiasm. They then disengage and become passive.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. The majority of these are there for medical reasons. School leaders are in regular contact with the providers to check on progress. As a result of the close liaison, these pupils are able to continue to make progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school is a calm and orderly environment. The conduct of pupils around the school site is good. Behaviour has improved markedly over the last few years and so the number excluded has fallen significantly. Pupils are good-humoured and treat each other well. There is a warmth about the relationships across the school, both between pupils and with teachers.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They are grateful that their learning is now rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Year 11 pupils talk about how much this aspect of the school has improved since they first joined it. Pupils generally remain compliant even when the quality of teaching is weaker.
- Pupils now attend school as regularly as pupils in other schools. The number who are persistently absent has dropped significantly because of the emphasis the school has placed on the importance of coming to school every day. Disadvantaged pupils also now attend regularly. The school's work in this area has been a real success.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over the last few years, pupils of all abilities have made poor progress across most subjects. They are now beginning to make better progress than they have in the past. This is because work the school is doing to improve teaching, learning and assessment is having some positive impact. However, there is more to do, as standards remain below those in other schools.
- Disadvantaged pupils are now making significantly better progress than at the time of the previous inspection. This is because teachers have supported them and ensured that they have been prepared for examinations appropriately. Nonetheless, disadvantaged pupils still make substantially less progress than other pupils in other schools nationally.
- In the past, the most able pupils have not made good progress, and few attained the highest grades. This is improving. In English, mathematics and science, these pupils are responding to the improved quality of teaching and are beginning to reach higher standards.
- Pupils' standards of literacy are lower than those of pupils in other schools. Many join the school with poor reading and writing skills and they do not catch up quickly enough. Standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar are all low. Many pupils have a limited vocabulary, and their ability to construct complex sentences is weak. Poor writing skills prevent pupils, including the most able, from expressing their ideas as well as they should be able to. This has a negative impact on their progress across most subjects. It is a key reason for the school's weak GCSE outcomes.
- There is a large variation in the progress pupils make between the core subjects. In English, progress is well below that of other schools. Results have remained broadly static for some time. Pupils in the school now are beginning to do better, but the improvement is slow. In mathematics, there has been a steady improvement over the last few years. Current pupils are building on that success. Progress in science is also improving. Pupils are now beginning to achieve broadly in line with pupils in other schools.
- Pupils make less progress than pupils in other schools in many other subjects. Standards are low in history and geography, for instance. Pupils do considerably better in the arts. In art, photography and music, pupils make good progress and achieve strong outcomes.
- Pupils' final levels of attainment overall are substantially lower than in most schools. However, this is partially because they join the school with much lower than average key stage 2 scores. Very few pupils achieve the English baccalaureate (Ebacc) qualification, which consists of a range of GCSEs, including a foreign language. This is because a large number of pupils do not choose to take a foreign language and so they cannot achieve the qualification.

School details

Unique reference number	136193
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10048263

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	703
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Chris Ormrod
Headteacher	Jen Veal
Telephone number	01823 348200
Website	www.thetauntonacademy.com/
Email address	reception@thetauntonacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	10–11 January 2017

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average secondary school. However, it is growing rapidly. It is sponsored by the Richard Huish multi-academy trust.
- It has a higher than average proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- There are currently 10 pupils in alternative provision at five providers: Bridgwater and Taunton Technical College, Otterhead Forest School, Hair Academy, Conquest Equine Therapy, and Taunton Deane Partnership College.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of local governing body and trust meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour data, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Meetings were held with members of the trust and local governing body, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 98 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to parents in person. They also took into account the responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Malcolm Davison	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Jenny Maraspin	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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