

Taunton's College

Inspection report

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Taunton's College is designated as a medium sized sixth form college (SFC) serving learners living in the west of Southampton. The city is a unitary authority with a population of around 220,000. Unemployment rates are low at just over 2%, although a higher proportion of residents than nationally are economically inactive. Southampton is in the bottom third of local authorities on the index of relative deprivation. Around a quarter of the adult population has no qualifications, and there are low levels of literacy and numeracy. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is 7.6%.
2. 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 post-

sixteen. Most local schools are 11 to 16 comprehensives. A* to C grade pass rates at GCSE in the city are significantly below national pass rates.

3. The college offers courses in 11 of the 15 sector skills areas. Provision is available at entry level, and at levels 1 to 3. It is particularly broad at level 3 and covers a wide range of both vocational and academic programmes. Courses include General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS awards in 38 subjects and GCE A level awards in 35 subjects, the International Baccalaureate, BTEC national diplomas and certificates, child care awards, NCFE awards and other specialist music and sports awards. Many learners study combinations of these courses and at different levels.
4. In 2006/07, the college enrolled 1,967 learners on 8,050 courses. Of these learners, 71% were aged 16 to 18 who represent the majority of full-time students. Adults mainly study part time. Half the students aged 16 to 18 and nearly three quarters of adult learners are women. Learners who have achieved grades of B or above in six GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics, attend the college's sixth form academy. This also offers specialist provision in music and sport. Learners from minority ethnic groups make up 16% of the 16 to 18 cohort, and 8% of adult learners.
5. The college's mission is to provide outstanding education to meet and extend the aspirations of young people of all abilities; its vision is to increase participation in post-compulsory education and particularly at level 3.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: contributory grade 1</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

6. Taunton's College is a good college. The new senior management team has taken decisive action to drive up standards; it is ambitious for success. It has made significant improvements to learners' achievements and sharpened the college's focus on learning. For example, managers have introduced a rigorous homework policy which is strictly implemented. Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory. All age success rates at level 2 rose to 71% in 2006/07; those at level 3 rose slightly to 75%. The college has expanded its range of vocational provision and outcomes for learners on these programmes have improved. Although success rates are below those for sixth form colleges nationally, they reflect the much wider range of vocational provision offered, where national success rates are lower. For learners with higher prior attainment on entry to the college, standards and success rates are good. Learners from a wide range of backgrounds and prior attainment generally make the progress expected of them, and this progress improved in 2006/07. Individual and team achievements, particularly in sport and music, are good. Financial management of the college is now outstanding.
7. The quality of provision is good. The college accurately assesses the quality of teaching and learning as good. It takes effective action to improve the range of teaching strategies used by teachers to meet the varied needs of learners. It provides a particularly broad range of programmes and activities to meet learners' needs and interests. Support and guidance are good and have a clear focus on learners' needs and the development of effective study practices. Learners with additional learning needs are well supported.
8. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. It provides learning pathways that include combinations of academic and vocational routes at levels 1, 2 and 3. It collaborates successfully with local schools and colleges to increase participation. Learners from diverse backgrounds and with a wide range of prior attainment are successfully integrated into the life of the college and enjoy its welcoming and friendly atmosphere. The college reviews its curriculum regularly; it is well matched to the diverse needs and interests of learners. Action to improve the achievement of male learners and those from minority ethnic groups has been successful. Progression within the college and to other establishments, including higher education and employment, is good. Enrichment is excellent and involves learners in a diverse range of programmes. The college promotes the achievements of its learners in these activities, and in academic studies, particularly well. Its leadership and management are good.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. The college's capacity to improve its provision for learners is good. Managers, governors and staff are committed to improving success rates for learners and have made good progress in improving achievement rates, particularly in

vocational subjects. The new senior management team has made significant changes to the management structure to improve accountability. Quality improvement arrangements have been implemented successfully and have sharpened the college's focus on learning. The college's self-assessment report is thorough and accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Managers are systematically addressing identified areas of weakness.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

10. The college has rectified many weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. The financial position of the college has improved significantly, as have target setting, accommodation for learners, and the accuracy of lesson observation assessment. Achievement rates on many courses have risen. Educational and social inclusion is now outstanding. However, the college has not yet improved achievement rates for key skills qualifications. Achievement rates on GCE AS courses, although improved, remain below national averages.

Key strengths

- successful management of change
- highly effective quality improvement arrangements for teaching and learning
- strong collaborative partnerships to improve participation
- outstanding equality of opportunity and educational and social inclusion
- excellent enrichment activities
- good achievement of learners in the sixth form academy
- good improvement in success rates on vocational courses at level 3.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- retention rates
- achievement rates at AS level
- access to ICT facilities for teaching and learning
- GCSE mathematics provision
- achievement rates on key skills qualifications.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

11. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. All age success rates at level 2 rose to 71% in 2006/07; those at level 3 rose slightly to 75%. The college has expanded its vocational provision and increased the number of learners taking these courses. Improvements to success rates on vocational courses at levels 2 and 3 are good. The number of 16 to 18 year old learners starting vocational courses at level 3 has more than doubled over the last three years and the success rate on these courses has improved significantly during this period, to 73%. For adults on courses at level 2, the improvement is particularly marked. The success rate for learners on full-time level 1 courses was 84% in 2006/07. However, those following level 1 courses in preparation for GCSE as part of a mixed programme of courses were less successful.
12. The college's current senior management team was appointed in 2005/06. It has taken successful action to improve pass rates, which rose to 87% for level 3 courses in 2006/07. In 2006/07, pass rates on vocational courses rose to 90% at level 2, and to 89% at level 3. At GCE AS level in 2006/07, overall and high grade pass rates rose, although they remain below national averages. Pass rates for male learners, relative to those of their female counterparts, have improved; those for minority ethnic groups have also improved and are similar to those for the college as a whole. Learners at the college's sixth form academy perform particularly well and the standard of their work is high. In 2006/07, GCE A level pass rates were 99% and almost half of these were at high grades. The A* to C grades in GCSE mathematics, however, remain poor.
13. New strategies to improve attendance and punctuality have recently been introduced. Learners generally arrive promptly at lessons and ready to learn. At the time of the inspection, the attendance rate was good at 91%.
14. The standard of learners' work in lessons is satisfactory. Work of a high standard, for example in art or textile design, is displayed prominently in the college. Learners enjoy participating in competitive and performance events such as sport and music. Their achievement in these activities is particularly strong, and the college celebrates them well.
15. The educational attainment of learners enrolling at the college is broad ranging. The progress that they make, relative to their prior attainment, is broadly satisfactory. In 2006/07, learners achieved grades better than might be expected in 19 of the 37 GCE A level subjects offered; they achieved less well in 12 of these subjects.
16. Retention rates are relatively low. During recent years they have remained at about 84% which is below the national rate. The college has focused on improving retention this year and early indicators are good. The number of learners who have withdrawn from courses since September 2007 has fallen to 6% compared with 11% for the same period in 2006. Key skills completion rates are poor. Although many learners are successful in key skills tests none

completed a portfolio in 2005/06. The college recognises these weaknesses in its self-assessment and is taking action to improve performance.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

17. Teaching and learning are good. The college's observation scheme is accurate and gives detailed information on strengths and areas for improvement which are identified in the self-assessment report. Strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning at subject level are well managed and effective. They include sharing of good practice and specialised in-service training. The college's peer review scheme has improved teachers' ability to reflect on and improve their own practice.
18. Most lessons have clear objectives and well designed activities to meet a range of learners' needs. Regular and frequent homework has improved learning and put more emphasis on disciplined study habits. In the best lessons, teachers challenge and involve all learners effectively to improve their knowledge and understanding. Learners work well, both independently and in groups. They assess each others' understanding effectively. Feedback on coursework and homework is sufficiently detailed to help learners improve. In a small number of lessons, learners are not sufficiently encouraged to participate. As a consequence, they do not make the progress expected and teachers do not routinely check their learning and understanding.
19. Teachers monitor learners' progress well during regular reviews, making good use of accurate management information to motivate learners. Initial assessment is effective in identifying students' learning support needs early and the college provides good and timely support for those with additional learning needs, learning difficulties and disabilities. Learning assistants work well with teachers to support students in lessons who make good use of the learning support centre. Those receiving support make good progress, however, the college does not fully analyse the impact of its learning support.
20. Although teachers generally make good use of information and learning technologies (ILT), facilities for ILT are not available in all classrooms. In a few lessons ILT is not used sufficiently to help learners make progress with their studies. Learners make effective use of the computers available to them in the library and in teaching rooms to improve their independent learning skills.
21. The college provides a particularly broad range of programmes and activities which are well matched to learners' needs. Courses enable learners to follow pathways in vocational, academic and a mixture of studies according to their interests and prior attainment. For example, learners combine courses leading to GCE AS, BTEC national and NCFE qualifications. Programmes include specialist provision at advanced level for higher achievers, and courses which enable learners to achieve advanced qualifications over three years. The college provides relevant additional study courses to support learners' main programmes of study such as intermediate qualifications in skills for employability.

22. The college's excellent range of enrichment activities broadens learners' experience and enhances their personal development. Activities are accessible and take-up is good. They include a wide range of visits, clubs, voluntary and charitable work. For example, students raise funds to support and work on projects in a school in Tanzania. Frequent events and displays are used, for example, to promote healthy lifestyles. Learners like the friendly atmosphere at the college and the enrichment opportunities it provides.
23. The college has highly effective partnerships with other local providers. For example, collaboration with the nearby general further education college has enabled students to progress to higher level vocational courses. Partnerships with local universities have increased participation and progression into higher education.
24. Guidance and support are good. The college works hard to attract learners. Its recruitment and guidance procedures ensure learners are placed on programmes appropriate to their interests and abilities. Induction is thorough and gives learners clear information about their courses, equality and diversity and on health and safety. The college provides helpful and valued counselling, learner mentor and financial support. Careers guidance is effective in assuring progression to higher education and appropriate employment.
25. Tutors and the tutorial programme provide good personal and social development. Tutors monitor attendance, punctuality and behaviour closely and support learners successfully to develop a strong culture of learning. Tutorials are used well to review learners' progress and guide their progression. The college has introduced much improved arrangements to support learners who are at risk of leaving, including the use of learning mentors and supervised support. Study skills specialists work well with curriculum teams to improve learning. However, information on learners' progress following additional learning support interventions is not systematically shared with tutors.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: grade 1

26. Leadership and management at the college are good. The current senior management team was newly appointed in 2005/06. It has taken decisive action to improve provision. Senior managers and governors provide a clear strategic direction for the college. Management structures have recently changed significantly to provide greater accountability; they now have a strong focus on quality improvement. Managers and staff have been successful in creating a safe and effective learning environment at the college, and in focusing attention on improvements to teaching and learning. The college's financial position has improved considerably over recent years and its financial management is now outstanding. Resources are used efficiently. These

changes have been managed well, and with the support of staff. Communication and consultation with staff and learners are good.

27. The governance of the college is good. Governors are challenging and supportive, with high expectations of staff and learners. They are well informed and monitor the college's performance effectively. Women are currently under-represented on the governing body.
28. The college's quality improvement processes are thorough and have been successful in raising standards. A clear cycle of internal and external reviews is used to monitor performance and improve achievement. Thorough peer referencing processes improve teaching and learning. Courses are removed from the curriculum if they fail to meet the standards expected. Learner surveys and focus groups are used effectively to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement. The college's self-assessment process accurately identifies overall strengths and areas for improvement. Reviews at curriculum level are systematic although not yet sufficiently evaluative, and depend on moderation by senior managers for fully accurate assessment of provision.
29. Teachers are well qualified and supported. The college has provided extensive professional development to support the changes made and to aid improvement. Its accommodation is well maintained and significant investment has been undertaken to provide more social and study spaces, IT resources and a new learner services area. The college has been successful in its application for new buildings.
30. The promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college actively promotes positive attitudes to equality and diversity through a wide range of learner focus groups, events and activities. The college successfully recruits learners of diverse abilities and backgrounds. Learners are sensitively and well treated. Senior managers pay close attention to the success rates of different groups, and have been successful in raising achievement rates among minority ethnic groups and male learners. All managers and governors have received training on the safeguarding of young people. The college meets its statutory requirements for the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002. Its race equality policy and child protection procedures are appropriate and properly implemented. The college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	181	60	64	-4	291	37	56	-19
	05/06	288	57	71	-14	13	77	56	21
	06/07	284	58	...	...	6	67	...	...
GNVQs	04/05	15	53	71	-18	...	...	...	...
	05/06	14	93	79	14	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04/05	6	50	...	...	11	64	...	...
	05/06	6	33	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Other	04/05	160	61	63	-2	280	36	56	-20
	05/06	268	56	71	-15	13	77	56	21
	06/07	283	58	...	...	5	60	...	...

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	915	65	73	-8	208	58	56	2
	05/06	720	70	78	-8	130	68	64	4
	06/07	631	69	...	...	102	85	...	...
GCSEs	04/05	422	79	78	1	91	75	65	10
	05/06	388	75	82	-7	62	65	66	-1
	06/07	395	72	...	...	40	80	...	...
GNVQs	04/05	85	74	74	0	...	...	...	...
	05/06	61	84	77	7	2	0	...	...
	06/07	65	65	...	...	2	100	...	...
NVQs	04/05	15	67	62	5	22	50	58	-8
	05/06	9	56	70	-14	13	100	68	32
	06/07	...	...	...	...	36	92	...	...
Other	04/05	393	49	62	-13	95	44	52	-8
	05/06	262	60	70	-10	53	68	61	7
	06/07	171	64	...	...	24	83	...	...

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	2687	75	82	-7	256	55	59	-4
	05/06	2597	73	83	-10	172	70	65	5
	06/07	2724	75	...	...	121	71	...	...
A/A2 Levels	04/05	770	89	92	-3	90	67	76	-9
	05/06	662	92	93	-1	55	78	78	0
	06/07	698	91	...	...	32	84	...	...
AS Levels	04/05	1578	70	78	-8	105	52	54	-2
	05/06	1635	66	79	-13	78	63	58	5
	06/07	1571	68	...	...	38	71	...	...
GNVQs	04/05	127	65	74	-9	...	...	...	...
	05/06	55	69	74	-5	2	50	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04/05	1	0	...	...	41	41	50	-9
	05/06	1	100	...	...	15	87	63	24
	06/07	3	100	45	60
Other	04/05	211	61	72	-11	20	45	56	-11
	05/06	244	69	75	-6	22	64	62	2
	06/07	464	73	5	80

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