School report

The Taunton Academy

Cheddon Road, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7QP

Inspection dates	10–11 January 2017
Overall effectiveness	**Inadequate**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	**Requires improvement**
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	**Inadequate**
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	**Requires improvement**
Outcomes for pupils	**Inadequate**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Outcomes are inadequate because pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not make the progress they are capable of.
- The proportion of pupils who attain the basics of the English and mathematics GCSEs is consistently well below average.
- Pupils are not well prepared for their next steps. Too many lack the qualifications which will allow them to progress to the next stage of employment, training or education.
- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching across the school. As a result, significant gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills remain in several subjects.
- Many pupils enter the school in Year 7 with low standards of literacy. Pupils do not receive the good-quality teaching they need to catch up, and so by the time they leave the school their skills are not sufficiently strong.
- Behaviour requires improvement. Although leaders have higher expectations, some lessons continue to be interrupted by poor behaviour.
- Attendance levels are below the national average. There are some signs of improvement, but rates of absence remain too high.
- Too many pupils, particularly those with low prior attainment, do not take pride in their work and so they do not present their work neatly.
- Leaders have only recently introduced mechanisms for assessing pupils' progress accurately.
- Historically, leaders have not ensured that support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective.
- All middle leaders are new to their roles. Consequently, they have not yet had time to bring about consistently good teaching in their subject areas.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has been instrumental in stabilising the school over the last year. She has halted a decline in standards and successfully brought the school through a period of considerable change and uncertainty.
- There is some evidence of improvement in teaching since the start of this academic year.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school at break and lunchtimes has improved considerably in the last year.
- The local advisory board and trust directors understand the improvements that need to be made and have the skills required to bring about change.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- 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.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the school has undergone significant changes in senior and middle leadership. This turbulence has hindered the improvements that were needed. However, the new headteacher has halted the school's decline. She faced a situation where there was low staff morale, a serious financial deficit and little confidence in the school's ability to provide a good quality of education. Her tenacious work to reorganise and restructure the school has provided much-needed stability and established a fresh vision. Staff and pupils comment that the culture and climate in the school are markedly better than before she was appointed.
- After her appointment in January 2016, the headteacher quickly assessed the school's shortcomings. Supported by the trust, she swiftly developed the appropriate systems required to run an effective school. Since the start of this academic year, these systems are now being consistently implemented. For example, newly appointed leaders have introduced robust procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and reporting on their progress. Consequently, leaders and governors now have accurate information on which to base their self-evaluation of the school.
- Because accurate performance and assessment information has not been available until recently, leaders have been poorly informed about pupils' progress. Predictions about examination performance have been overgenerous and, as a result, the pupils who needed most support did not receive it.
- Leaders have not assessed pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities accurately in the past. Consequently, the school has not accessed funding for these pupils. In spite of the recent efforts of current leaders, support for these pupils is not yet good enough.
- In the past, senior leaders did not manage the performance of teachers effectively. Middle leaders were not held accountable for performance in their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders now have a robust system for managing the performance of teachers. As a result, teachers are held to account effectively for the progress of pupils.
- Middle leaders are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in their subject areas. They are increasingly confident to challenge the underperformance that still exists and so bring about improvement.
- Five new middle leaders, appointed at the start of the academic year, have made some improvements in their areas of the curriculum. An example is the effective moderation of teachers' judgements about pupils' work which takes place in English. However, these leaders have not yet had time to secure enough improvement in pupils' progress and so outcomes remain inadequate at present.
- Governors are now aware that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and for those pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up has not been effective in raising pupils' attainment. As the stability of the school has been achieved, governors have increased the level of challenge so that school leaders are held better to account for the use and impact of this additional funding.

- The curriculum has had significant weaknesses and has not promoted pupils' progress well in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. However, a new curriculum has been introduced which is more suitable to the needs of the pupils. A number of applied courses have been withdrawn and there are now no off-site vocational programmes. While this has reduced the number of courses available to pupils in key stage 4, it has brought a better focus on a smaller number of key qualifications. More time is devoted to English and mathematics in key stage 3 and a core group of pupils in Year 9 are now provided with extra support to improve their basic skills. Senior leaders are resolute in their ambition to develop vocational subjects and maintain strong creative and artistic subjects. For example, art and textiles are taught well throughout the school.
- A range of extra-curricular clubs and activities are offered, including the 'Have I got news for you' current affairs club and music and drama groups. These opportunities enhance the current curriculum.
- Careers education, advice and guidance provided for pupils from Year 8 onwards are not sufficiently personalised. Senior leaders do not thoroughly evaluate the programme and consequently have no appreciation of how effective it is. Nor have they been able to develop a plan for the future.
- The new leadership team has quickly created a positive staff culture. Testimony to its work is seen in the responses to the staff questionnaire where the vast majority of staff said that they are proud to work at the school. Leaders have provided greater clarity about expectations of teachers' work and backed this up with professional development training. This has resulted in better staff morale and a greater awareness of what pupils should know, understand and be able to do.
- The school has struggled in the past to recruit teachers in particular subjects, such as mathematics. Leaders have successfully addressed recruitment issues by retraining teachers to work in shortage subjects. The vast majority of lessons are now taught by staff with appropriate subject knowledge.
- Pupils are increasingly well prepared for life in modern Britain through assemblies, tutor times and visits. For example, Year 10 pupils recently visited a magistrates' court and so have a better understanding of the law. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum and through the active Christian Union group and the work of the school chaplain.
- A 'Somerset Education Partner' from the local authority has worked with the school since September 2016. She scrutinises the school's work and so helps leaders to precisely identify the priorities for school improvement.

Governance of the school

- Governance of the school has changed completely since the previous inspection because of the change of sponsor. A number of directors of the Richard Huish Trust (the trust), the new sponsor, sit on the local advisory board, which represents the trust at school level. Both the directors of the trust and the members of the local advisory board are highly skilled and experienced. They possess the expertise necessary to deal with the problems that existed when they took over and to improve standards in the future.

- Governors acted immediately to appoint a new headteacher and since then have supported her well to deal with deep-seated financial problems and an unsustainable staffing structure at the school. In September 2016, the trust considerably strengthened leadership capacity at the school by appointing two new senior leaders and an entire new middle leadership group.
- Senior leaders are providing governors with more accurate information about pupils' progress. Consequently, governors are better able to evaluate the performance of the school. In particular, they are able to challenge senior leaders over the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, Year 7 pupils who need to catch up and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding lead, the school's pastoral staff and teachers have all been proactive in protecting vulnerable pupils in the school. The whole-school behaviour system, along with other interventions, has raised the profile of safeguarding. There is now a positive safeguarding culture at the school. The personal, social and health education programme and other parts of the revised curriculum support this culture well.
- Staff are suitably trained and alert to signs of abuse and clear procedures are in use to report and act on concerns. A 'team around the school' approach enables good communication with the local authority and other outside agencies. Consequently, the school is efficient at accessing local resources such as 'early help'.
- Using the expertise of the trust, the local advisory board has vigorously checked and updated the school's safeguarding practices. Because of this scrutiny, the school has effective policies and procedures regarding, for example, attendance and bullying.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment — Inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate because over time, in a broad range of subjects, it has not enabled pupils to make the progress they are capable of.
- Teachers are not fully meeting the needs of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and so pupils make inadequate progress.
- Teachers' expectations are not high enough. Until recently, information about pupils' prior attainment has been unreliable. Teachers do not routinely plan learning well enough to tackle gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. Consequently, work set for pupils is often too easy and fails to interest or motivate them.
- Teachers do not focus sufficiently on tackling weaknesses in pupils' literacy and mathematical skills. Basic literacy errors in pupils' work are often overlooked, so spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes persist.
- A large proportion of pupils enter the school with low reading ages. Programmes to improve their reading and other literacy skills have only recently been put in place.

There has not yet been time to fully evaluate them and determine whether they have been successful.

- Teaching has been particularly weak in mathematics over time. Pupils are often given work which is undemanding and so progress has been poor in this subject. However, there are early signs that this is improving.
- Where teachers do not follow the agreed systems for managing behaviour, pupils do not invest enough care in their work. As a result, their written work becomes untidy and inaccurate.
- Leaders have introduced assessment procedures to establish reliable information about what pupils know, understand and can do. From this, leaders have ensured that teachers are clearer about pupils' targets. Teachers are starting to have higher expectations and plan activities to help pupils who are making slower progress.
- The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the start of the academic year. Teachers have higher expectations and plan learning that better meets pupils' needs. However, pupils do not yet experience high-quality teaching and learning across the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare — Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Many pupils do not take pride in their learning and so do not complete tasks in lessons as well as they should.
- Careers education, advice and guidance are not strategically planned. As a result, there is not enough individual advice for pupils. Over the last year, the close relationship with Richard Huish College has raised pupils' aspirations. Several disadvantaged pupils who spoke to inspectors described impressive career goals.
- Pupils are beginning to build greater self-confidence and show more pride in their school in response to a fresh emphasis on rewards and recognition. Pupils wear their uniform smartly and show respect for their environment. There is very little litter or graffiti around the site.
- School staff handle incidents of bullying well. The vast majority of pupils spoken to during the inspection said that although incidents of bullying still occur, they are less common than in the past. Senior leaders and other staff give strong messages about the harmful effects of bullying and this gives pupils confidence in them.
- An effective personal, social and health education programme is enabling pupils to know how to stay safe online, when using social media and in a range of other situations. Pupils feel able to approach their teachers for help when they need it and so they feel well supported.
- A large majority of parents who responded to Parent View believe that pupils are happy and safe at this school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Some lessons are interrupted by pupils' disrespectful behaviour, which wastes time and prevents learning from taking place. However, in most cases, pupils have good relationships with their teachers.
- Attendance is below the national average. A range of new approaches have been introduced to challenge pupils' absence. For example, a home-school liaison officer has been appointed and taken on a prominent role in the school. While there are some signs of improvement, leaders recognise that attendance is still too low and rates of persistent absence remain too high.
- The conduct of pupils around the school at lunch and breaktime has improved since the arrival of the new headteacher and her new senior team. Although the rate of exclusions initially increased as a result of higher expectations of behaviour, it is beginning to reduce. Many pupils and staff commented on the calmer, more orderly atmosphere compared with 12 months ago.
- The small number of pupils educated in alternative off-site provision make good progress, attend regularly and behave well.

Outcomes for pupils — Inadequate

- There was a decline in the attainment of pupils in 2015. Standards in the school at that time fell below the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress. Following the change of academy sponsor, this decline in standards was halted. However, standards have remained low.
- Year-on-year, pupils' attainment when they start in Year 7 has been below average. In 2016, the overall rate of pupils' progress, when compared to pupils with the same starting points, was significantly below the national average. Pupils left the school with levels of attainment across a range of subjects that were well below those seen nationally. This is a barrier to their next steps in education or employment because they do not possess the qualifications necessary for higher-level study or training.
- In 2015 and 2016, the proportion of pupils who attained a good GCSE in both English and mathematics was well below the national average. While the progress current pupils make in English has improved, their progress in mathematics is weaker. Subsequently, too few pupils leave school with both basic qualifications.
- The many pupils who entered the school with low prior attainment have historically not made the progress they should and were not helped to catch up. Where teachers are not providing stimulating activities for these pupils, they lose concentration. The result is that they either do not complete tasks or take little care over their work and so complete it to a low standard.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have not been well supported in the past. Processes in the school for assessing the individual needs of pupils and identifying any barriers that hinder their learning have only recently been established. Consequently, many pupils are not receiving the help they need and so they make less progress than they should be expected to make.

- Disadvantaged pupils, other than the most able disadvantaged, make considerably less progress in English, mathematics, science and humanities than other pupils nationally. Historically weak assessment practice in the school has led to low expectations for these pupils and consequently their progress has been slow. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is high and local advisory board members are acutely aware of the need to use the additional funding that is provided for these pupils more effectively.
- Pupils in key stage 3 take part in coordinated interventions which are encouraging them to read and improve their wider literacy and numeracy skills with some success. Interventions for pupils in key stage 4 are not as well coordinated and so major weaknesses in their literacy and numeracy skills remain.
- The proportion of pupils who secure a place in education, employment or training when they leave the school has been below average in the past. Improved links with further education providers have resulted in this proportion being higher this year.
- The most able pupils make progress which is in line with the national average overall. In English, mathematics and a range of other subjects, these pupils are challenged more effectively by their teachers and they learn well as a result. The small number of most able pupils who are disadvantaged also benefit from a suitably high level of challenge and so make better progress.

School details

Unique reference number	136193
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10012369

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	599
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Chris Ormrod
Headteacher	Jenny Veal
Telephone number	01823 348200
Website	www.thetauntonacademy.com/
Email address	reception@thetauntonacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	12–13 June 2014 and 3 July 2014

Information about this school

- The governance of the school has changed considerably since the previous inspection. The Richard Huish Trust became the school's new sponsor in June 2015. A local advisory board has delegated powers to oversee the work of the school.
- In 2015, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- A new headteacher joined the school in January 2016.
- There have been major changes to the staffing structure in the last 12 months. A large number of staff have either left the school or been redeployed to different roles. Two new deputy headteachers and five new middle leaders were appointed in September 2016.
- The school has taken the decision to close its sixth-form provision, so no new students were admitted to post-16 study in September 2016 and existing students were transferred elsewhere.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding is above average.
- Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and very few speak English as an additional language. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site alternative provision at Richard Huish College.
- A 'Somerset Education Partner' provided by the local authority offers leadership advice to the school.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, governors and groups of pupils in key stages 3 and 4.
- Inspectors observed learning in a range of subjects and age groups and conducted many of the observations jointly with senior leaders. They scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work. Inspectors listened to a number of pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour logs, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Inspectors took account of 32 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, 13 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 24 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Paul Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Gary Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Colledge	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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