



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

TAUNTON SCHOOL AND TAUNTON SCHOOL INTERNATIONAL

MARCH 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Taunton School and Taunton School International			
DfE number	933/6025			
Registered charity number	1081420			
Address	Taunton School Staplegrove Road Taunton TA2 6AD			
Telephone number	01823 703703			
Email address	enquiries@tauntonschool.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Lee Glaser			
Chair of governors	Mr Henry Keeling			
Age range	13 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll				
Taunton School	524			
Taunton School International	83			
	Boys	349	Girls	258
	Day pupils	298	Boarders	309
	Seniors	350	Sixth Form	257
Inspection dates	1 to 2 March 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended house meetings. Inspectors visited boarding houses together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Kate McCarey	Reporting inspector
Mr Michael Evans	Team inspector (Senior master, HMC school)
Mr Colin Haddon	Team inspector (Deputy head, ISA school)
Mr Andrew Johnson	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mrs Kathryn Macaulay	Team inspector (Deputy head, ISC school)
Mr James Whitehead	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Taunton School was founded in 1847 as the West of England Dissenters Proprietary School, for boarders and day boys belonging to non-conformist families. It moved to its present site in 1870 and was renamed Taunton School in 1899. It became fully co-educational in 1973 and now educates both boarders and day pupils aged between 13 and 19. Taunton School International (TSI) occupies an adjacent site and provides one and two-year intensive GCSE courses for international and British pupils. Taunton School offers both A level and the International Baccalaureate (IB) courses.
- 1.2 The school is owned by a charitable trust whose members act as governors. Since the previous inspection there have been planned changes to the senior leadership teams in both Taunton School and TSI. Taunton School now offers the BTEC Extended Diploma (Level 3) in Sport and Exercise Sciences in the sixth form.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school seeks to challenge, inspire and nurture young people to succeed in a global community. It endeavours to ensure that pupil well-being is at the heart of everything the school does.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Day pupils largely come from professional British families. Over 35 different nationalities are represented amongst the boarders. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils is above average in the senior school and average in the sixth form. Taunton School has identified 110 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, of whom 56 receive support. Also, 1 pupil has an education, health and care plan. A total of 110 pupils are identified as having English as an additional language (EAL), of whom 53 receive support. The school has identified 14 pupils as talented at sport, and they receive specialist teaching and coaching within and beyond the curriculum.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an integrated inspection in November 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Strengthen the role of middle management to ensure the dissemination of the best teaching and assessment practice across all departments, and come to a common agreement and understanding of assessment grades to make for consistency of practice.
 - Ensure that the quantity and quality of food available to boarders in the evening meet their needs.
 - Implement plans for the development of the library to ensure that it becomes an effective resource for pupils' learning.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous full inspection. Further details are in given in the main text of the report.
- 1.8 The recommendations of the intermediate boarding inspection in October 2014 were:
- Ensure that boarders' views on the timing and type of food provided in the evenings have sufficient opportunity to be heard and, where possible, receive responses.
 - Ensure that those responsible for the management of boarding actively seek ways to share good practice across the houses in both schools.
- 1.9 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous intermediate boarding inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning.
- Outcomes for pupils in the co-curricular programme are outstanding.
- Pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points up to GCSE, and appropriate progress in the sixth form.
- Strong leadership and management are improving pupils' overall achievements.
- Pupils' use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance their learning and develop their skills is not consistent across all subjects.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-understanding for their age and make intelligent and thoughtful choices.
- Pupils have an excellent appreciation of the diverse cultures within the school.
- Pupils behave well, accept responsibility and support each other.
- Pupils have a strong awareness of the need to stay safe, healthy and fit.
- Boarders' personal development is greatly enhanced by their experiences in their boarding communities.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Expedite the implementation of the school's digital strategy so that pupils have more opportunities to develop their ICT skills in lessons across the curriculum.
- Develop local community links in order to involve more pupils.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 Pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning throughout the school. They frequently take ownership of their own learning, as observed in a sixth form theatre studies lesson where they critiqued their own performance, and in collaborative learning in GCSE mathematics and English lessons. Lower ability pupils were fully engaged and therefore improving their understanding in a GCSE religious studies lesson. Highly positive attitudes are also evident within the co-curricular 'Horizons' programme, where pupils from the senior school and TSI are willing participants in a large variety of activities which aim to develop excellence and broaden pupils' experiences.
- 3.3 Notable achievements of pupils include several Arkwright Scholarships in design and technology (DT), a Royal Zoological Society prize for studies in animal behaviour and a short-list place for a national poetry prize. Pupils regularly achieve success in mathematics and science Olympiads. Sports scholars are encouraged to aim for ongoing excellence both within and beyond the school, for example gifted girl hockey players train with senior boys to enhance their skills. Co-curricular achievements include county and regional representation in a wide variety of sports. A significant number of pupils are selected to train with national coaching academies and there have been recent team successes in county and regional tournaments. Pupils have also achieved success in national youth and children's orchestras, and have won the county drama award. High-quality music and drama productions are a regular feature of school life. Many pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme, gaining bronze, silver and gold awards. The school has a thriving Combined Cadet Force and a pupil earned a nomination for Lord-Lieutenant's Cadet.
- 3.4 Pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points up to GCSE, and appropriate progress in the sixth form. The following analysis uses data from 2012 to 2015. Results in GCSE and IGCSE examinations have been above the national average and worldwide norms respectively. In 2016, results were significantly stronger than in previous years. These recent improvements have been brought about by initiatives from the senior leadership team such as more rigorous tracking and target setting, which have enabled effective interventions and individual support for pupils. Results at A level have been in line with the national average, and at IB have been higher than worldwide norms. A small cohort of sixth form pupils was entered for the BTec Extended Diploma (Level3) in Sport and Exercise Sciences and achieved excellent results. Pupils with SEND make good progress due to targeted support, and those with EAL make rapid progress from their starting points in both TSI and in the main school. More able pupils are provided opportunities to pursue the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), where results in 2016 were excellent.

- 3.5 Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are well-developed, in accordance with the school's aims. The curriculum embraces linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technical, human and social, physical and aesthetic, and creative areas, thus developing pupils' broad understanding of the modern world. Academically more able pupils produce their own scholars journal, and pupils with SEND were observed strengthening their essay writing skills in a well-planned English lesson. Extra support from teaching assistants is used to enhance the progress of less able pupils as they work towards GCSE examinations. Sixth form pupils spoke with enthusiasm in interviews about the benefits of the programmes for aspiring medical students and potential high-ranking university candidates. In the senior school, pupils of all abilities respond well to the creative and energetic teaching in many subjects. Art and DT displays around the school demonstrate a high degree of creativity and thoughtfulness. In their questionnaire responses and at interview, a few pupils expressed the view that their lessons are not always interesting. During the inspection a small minority of lessons were observed in which pupils were not engaged in their learning, thus limiting their short-term progress.
- 3.6 Pupils have highly developed communication skills. In lessons, they are articulate in their oral responses and can discuss and argue effectively. They also listen to each other carefully, as observed in a personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) lesson when discussing emotions. In a sixth form psychology lesson, pupils discussed the issue of anorexia using advanced subject-specific vocabulary and with considerable maturity. Debating is a strength of the school and provides many pupils the opportunity to refine their communication skills. Lessons observed in TSI included many opportunities for pupils to contribute orally and thus improve their communication in the English language.
- 3.7 Pupils have well-developed numeracy skills, and academically more able pupils finish the GCSE curriculum early before moving on to A-level work. Pupils also employ good numeracy skills effectively across the curriculum, for example when analysing data in sixth form chemistry. Many are competent users of ICT. Pupils' learning benefits from the use of advanced software in A-Level art and photography, and many teachers use interactive whiteboards to support pupils' learning. In relatively few lessons, pupils actively use digital technology in the classroom. A digital learning strategy is currently being implemented across the school to provide pupils more opportunities to develop and practise their ICT skills in order to enhance their learning.

Study skills are well-developed in both senior school and TSI pupils. Boarding and day pupils are encouraged by tutors within houses and by targeted one-to-one support where appropriate. In interview, pupils expressed appreciation for this individual support and for the refurbished library facility which is well used. Throughout the curricular programme, literacy skills are afforded a high priority. All departments encourage such skills, for instance the physics department has a 'book of the week' and the mathematics department run a book club. The pupils have also benefited from study skills sessions from an external provider. Sixth form pupils who have been involved in the EPQ speak highly of it as a route to developing their individual learning and research skills. Written work in the sixth form demonstrated good organisation and well-developed study skills in many areas. Pupils' progress is supported by individual tutorials with their subject teachers and house tutors. In most subjects pupils benefit from effective marking but there is some variation in quality between departments.

- 3.8 In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, almost all the pupils agreed that the school provides them the opportunity to learn and make progress, and a very large majority of parents confirmed that the school meets the educational needs of their children. Governors, the senior leadership team and middle management are implementing initiatives across the school such as the BTec advanced diploma programme and a more centralised and effective academic tracking system, and these are improving outcomes for pupils. The recommendation of the previous inspection to improve middle management has thus been met. Almost all the parents who responded to pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school is well led and managed.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils display high levels of self-understanding for their age, and make intelligent and thoughtful choices about their own behaviour and the interests that they wish to pursue. In this, they are strongly supported by the school's house system. Relationships between tutors and pupils in the senior school and TSI are very positive. Pupils are encouraged to choose activities which will broaden their experience as well as improve their talents; sports scholars take up debating or play for lower teams in a different sport. The wide choice of activities within the co-curricular programme is a very positive factor in developing pupils' sense of self-worth. A strong commitment to developing resilience is shared by both teachers and pupils, who embrace this 'have a go' approach with enthusiasm. Newly arrived international pupils spoke of the challenge of joining the football squads and other activities, and their eventual success. Pupils' needs are considered in lesson planning, and teachers have a strong awareness of the specific educational needs of each pupil. This improves pupil confidence.
- 4.3 In TSI, newly arrived international pupils are carefully supported and monitored in the first few weeks to enable them to settle in and make good progress. Pupils also develop self-knowledge by taking on positions of responsibility, which they do with enthusiasm. The peer-mentoring scheme is well established and is of great value for both the mentor and the recipient. Senior pupils lead house music preparation and other house events, and value the democratic process by which prefects are elected. Pupils learn leadership through the 'Momentum' programme. Those who have been through the programme then put their training into practice by teaching others.
- 4.4 Pupils have an excellent appreciation of and openness towards the diverse cultures within the school. The school is a strong multi-cultural community, built on mutual respect of each other's cultures and faiths. In their questionnaire responses, almost all parents indicated that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Pupils' personal development is greatly enhanced by the school's international environment, in line with the school's aim to be a global community. Within the school's Christian ethos, other spiritual frameworks are recognised and valued and the chapel is a central place for pupils to reflect, as well as for prayer and assemblies. Pupils also value the displays of their art and DT work around the school, and enjoy the richness of different cultural festivals celebrated in boarding houses throughout the school. The well-developed PSHEE programme allows pupils to explore issues about themselves, each other and the world that they are preparing to enter as young adults, and they do so with enthusiasm.
- 4.5 The strong culture of debating within the school allows participation by many pupils and encourages a recognition of the importance of democracy, the rule of law and respect for others. Pupils from TSI are well integrated into the senior school co-curricular programme, and all pupils who were interviewed spoke about how they value their friendships with peers from other parts of the world. In their questionnaire responses, a small minority of pupils felt that teachers do not always provide a balanced view regarding the discussion of politics and current affairs. Discussions with a range of pupils and staff did not support this view.

- 4.6 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of good behaviour and an appreciation of the morals on which societies are built. Little bullying occurs, and pupils in interview confirmed that it is dealt with effectively if it happens. A small minority of pupils expressed concern in their questionnaire responses and in interview that they are not always treated fairly, the inspection observed many instances in lessons and houses where teachers and pupils had strongly supportive relationships based on fairness, and consequently no evidence was found to support this view. Pupils have also been involved in initiatives to modify behaviour, such as the pupil-led programme to reduce personal 'screen' usage of mobile phones and other digital devices. Peer mentoring and strong relationships between year groups in houses create a culture of mutual care for each other and responsibility for one's own behaviour.
- 4.7 Pupils have a strong awareness of the need to keep safe, healthy and fit. The extensive sport and co-curricular programme ensures that all pupils have plenty of exercise, and includes innovative opportunities such as capoeira, a Brazilian exercise routine combining dance and martial arts. Pupils understand how to eat healthily, with discrete and appropriate monitoring by staff. Their mental well-being is actively promoted by the school. The school has two counsellors and a recently appointed mental health nurse. The pupil body has mental health representatives, and an assembly on mental health was led by pupils. Pupils have a very strong awareness of the need to stay safe online, and confirm in their questionnaires and at interviews that the school educates them effectively in this regard.
- 4.8 Pupils have well-developed social awareness. They collaborate effectively, such as when designing a green-powered car or leading the 'Rag' week for charity fundraising. Pupils raise large amounts of money for various local and international charities, and many were recently involved in a cross-channel relay swim which raised a significant amount for a military charity. Pupils who take part in the DofE scheme are involved in service in a variety of settings including helping in the prep school and working in the school library, and a few pupils arrange their own voluntary work such as with Brownies or in a local care home. Opportunities to engage with the local community are not widely developed.
- 4.9 The boarding experience is highly positive in the senior school and TSI. Pupils spoke in interview of the increased independence and confidence they acquire and of how boarding allows them to be the person they want to be. Practice across boarding houses in both schools is now largely consistent, although houses do retain their characters and pupils appreciate their individuality. The boarding houses inspire pupils to broaden their outlook, get involved in school activities and engage in discussions about current events both in Britain and beyond. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Senior pupils take on leadership roles to support younger pupils, and personal development outcomes are enhanced by the boarding experience.