

# School inspection report

23 to 25 April 2024

## **Taunton School**

Staplegrove Road

Taunton

Somerset

TA2 6AD

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors maintain careful oversight of the school's leadership and management. They ensure that leaders have appropriate knowledge and understanding, and that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that they promote the wellbeing of pupils. The school's leaders have rigorous processes for evaluating the school's effectiveness, and the actions they take as a result have a positive impact on the quality of education provided and pupils' wellbeing. They have a thorough and informed approach to risk assessment.
2. The school provides a broad and flexible curriculum offering various pathways for international pupils and for day pupils and boarders alike. The teaching typically enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and understanding, develop key learning skills and make good progress. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and pupils achieve well. Pupils show interest in their work, are self-motivated and apply themselves well.
3. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress; however, sometimes teaching could be more tailored to pupils' needs so that they are able to access new learning more readily.
4. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) make considerable strides in learning English as a result of the expertise of specialist EAL staff in all three sections of the school. However, they do not achieve quite as well when they move from the international sections into Taunton School, where some teachers are less confident in the use of effective strategies to support language acquisition.
5. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons and the wide choice of co-curricular activities have a positive impact on pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing. Pupils' participation in activities is monitored carefully to ensure pupils maintain a healthy balance between their academic work and other activities.
6. The school prepares pupils well for life in British society. In the boarding houses, there is a strong emphasis on independent living, and leadership skills are developed in many areas such as the Combined Cadet Force (CCF). Diversity is celebrated and pupils are respectful of each other. The school helps pupils to develop their understanding of right and wrong and to accept responsibility for their actions.
7. The school provides a comprehensive careers guidance programme which is greatly valued by many pupils. However, leaders should ensure that the comprehensive guidance is better communicated to parents and pupils so that all pupils make effective use of the opportunities provided.
8. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. The safeguarding policy, which meets statutory requirements, is made available to parents via the school's website and is implemented effectively. Staff training in safeguarding procedures is thorough. Safeguarding incidents are dealt with appropriately, and suitable records are maintained. The school has effective working relationships with other agencies. There is a thorough system for checking the suitability of staff who are new to the school.
9. The school's co-curricular programme is a significant strength. It encompasses over 120 activities which offer pupils the opportunity to discover or pursue interests in music, dance, drama, sports and

many other areas. In addition, there are talks by external speakers on a wide range of topics, an extensive programme of trips and visits, the opportunity to engage in outdoor and adventurous activities through participation in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) or CCF, and a wide-ranging scholarship programme which is open to all. The programme has been carefully crafted and honed by the school's leaders, who take into account pupils' views and show a deep understanding of how to unearth the potential of each pupil. Pupils greatly value and enjoy the many opportunities open to them which make a major contribution to their physical and mental health, and their social, economic and emotional wellbeing.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

### Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that all teachers use appropriate strategies to support pupils who have SEND
- ensure that the language-teaching expertise which is available within the school is disseminated more widely to enable all staff to provide more effective support for pupils who speak EAL and to improve their progress
- ensure that all pupils make use of the advice and guidance available within the careers department.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors are well informed and play a crucial role in ensuring effective leadership. Through the oversight of various committees which gather and evaluate information, the governing body ensures that the school's leaders are fulfilling their responsibilities effectively and consistently. Governors work closely with leaders to formulate strategic objectives which take into account the views of parents and pupils.
11. The school's leaders demonstrate appropriate skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities. They ensure that the school's policies and procedures comply with relevant legislation and have regard to applicable guidance, that they are understood by staff and pupils and that they are implemented consistently. The effectiveness of the school's leadership can be seen, for example, in the way the co-curricular programme of activities has been developed over the last two years to include not only sporting activities, but one which provides equal weighting to other areas, such as music, dance and drama. The sports programme provides a wide range of sporting activities which cater for those who do not wish to engage in the more traditional team sports, such as rugby, hockey, cricket or netball. Leaders have introduced a system to monitor pupils' engagement in activities. This provides tutors with the information they need to identify the very small number of tutees who are not participating sufficiently or those who are in danger of over-committing themselves. This programme, together with a rich variety of trips and tours, a wide-reaching scholarship programme which is open to all pupils, and a varied programme of special activities such as concerts, drama productions, talks and inter-house competitions, demonstrates leaders' commitment to fulfilling the school's aims.
12. The restructuring of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching, pupils' engagement and the development of their knowledge, skills and understanding.
13. Leaders have introduced ways to ensure that they can gather the views of pupils more effectively. The school regularly gathers the views of pupils through surveys. Action taken as a result of these surveys has resulted, for example, in staff adopting a consistent approach to dealing with offensive comments in class which has been appreciated by pupils.
14. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. There is a suitable accessibility plan, which is monitored for implementation and effectiveness. As a result of actions taken, pupils with disabilities have greater access to the different areas of the school, the curriculum, and teaching and learning.
15. Leaders have rigorous processes for evaluating the strengths of the school and identifying areas for development. A detailed development plan is linked to the school's strategic objectives, identifying key tasks and responsibilities. For example, leaders evaluate the quality of teaching and take decisive action where teaching has not been good enough. Leaders' self-evaluation has resulted in the setting of ambitious academic targets to improve performance. Leaders track and monitor pupils' progress. Assessment data is used to inform pupils' subject choices and the design of the curriculum.
16. Leaders have a thorough approach to risk assessment. They identify risks systematically and take appropriate action to manage, reduce or mitigate these risks. Risk assessments are in place and

reviewed regularly; these include risk assessments for trips, activities and the different buildings to promote the wellbeing of both day pupils and boarders.

17. Leaders ensure that all the policies and documents, including those relating to boarding and the school's aims and values, are made available. Most of this information is readily accessible on the school's website. The school provides an annual account of the funding it receives for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans and reviews the plans. Leaders have responded to the school's own survey of parents' views and their comments about communication by introducing a weekly roundup of news. Leaders make available particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year to parents.
18. A suitable written complaints policy is made available to parents through the school's website. Complaints procedures are implemented robustly. Comprehensive confidential records are kept, and these are reviewed regularly to identify any emerging patterns. Boarders have clear and easily accessible processes by which they can raise any complaints about boarding provision.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance**

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The school provides a broad curriculum which is flexible and tailored to the needs, aspirations and interests of pupils. Pupils can choose from a wide range of subjects for study at GCSE, A level, BTEC and for the IB Diploma. All subjects have appropriate schemes of work which take into account pupils' ages, aptitudes and needs.
21. At GCSE, all pupils are expected to study mathematics, English and the sciences, either as separate or combined sciences. Pupils can then choose from a broad range of options within the remaining required areas of learning: linguistic, technological, human and social, aesthetic and creative. In addition, pupils can choose to broaden their academic skills by undertaking a higher project qualification (HPQ).
22. In the sixth form, each pupil is given a personalised plan tailored to their prior attainment and ambitions. Sixth form pathways include A levels, the IB Diploma, or BTEC qualifications. For pupils in Taunton School International, there is also the option to follow courses for a pre-foundation or an international foundation year. Pupils studying A levels have the opportunity to complete an extended project qualification (EPQ) which allows them to investigate an area of interest in more depth.
23. The school provides a broad range of options for international pupils. Intensive and effective English language teaching enables these pupils to develop a good working knowledge of English which equips them with the skills required to transfer from the international sections of the school into the main school.
24. Teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and understanding, develop key learning skills and make good progress. This is as a result of well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods. Teachers demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They make effective use of time, manage pupils' behaviour well and use a range of good-quality resources. They assess pupils' work regularly, providing helpful feedback to pupils and using information from their assessments to plan future work. Pupils show interest in their work, are self-motivated and apply themselves well.
25. Pupils achieve well and make good progress. Overall, the school adds value when measured against baseline assessments which pupils complete on entry to the school in Year 9. On leaving the school, pupils take up university or college places, join the armed forces, take up apprenticeships or enter the workplace.
26. Pupils who have SEND make good progress. The school's educational progress department provides specialist education for pupils from Year 9 through to the sixth form. Specialists identify pupils' educational needs and provide the relevant assistance to meet them, with a focus on developing learning strategies, study skills, revision and examination techniques. They provide advice and guidance for other staff as to the best methods to use with these pupils. Although teachers identify in their planning the strategies to be used to help pupils who have SEND, they do not always implement them.
27. Pupils who speak EAL make good progress. These pupils make considerable strides in learning English as a result of the knowledge and expertise of specialist EAL staff in all three sections of the school. However, the strategies which are used so successfully when pupils are working with

specialist staff are not always employed by other staff when pupils move from Taunton School International into the sixth form in Taunton School.

28. The school offers a wide-ranging programme of co-curricular activities for pupils. These are available before school, at lunchtimes, in the evenings, at weekends and during the dedicated activities slot after lessons have concluded. Leaders expect each pupil to participate in a minimum of three activities each week. The vast majority of pupils meet this expectation and most exceed it. The co-curricular programme makes a major contribution to the development of pupils' emotional, social, creative and physical skills.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation**

29. All the relevant Standards are met.

## Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

30. Leaders' decisions have had a positive impact on the quality of the school's personal development curriculum. PSHE, which incorporates relationships and sex education (RSE), is taught well by a team of staff who have received specialist training. Pupils show good levels of engagement in lessons. The programme contributes positively to pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing and meets the needs of the different ages and experiences. Pupils learn how to manage stress and how to nurture close bonds and healthy relationships. In the sixth form, the programme includes preparation for daily living skills and living independently.
31. Staff encourage mutual trust and respect for all members of the school community. Responses to non-inclusive behaviour have been robust leading to a reduction in instances of discriminatory behaviour. As part of the school's anti-bullying strategy, older pupils support younger pupils to develop positive relationships with their peers.
32. An extensive programme of sports and sport-related activities enables pupils to develop a wide range of physical skills, to be active and to focus on their physical health and wellbeing. Pupils may choose to participate in the sports programme at different levels. Many represent the school in team games whilst others engage in recreational activities such as Pilates. All pupils in Years 9 and 10 are assessed in terms of their athletic ability which helps them to understand their physical strengths which, in turn, helps them to choose the sporting activities to which they are most suited.
33. The school's behaviour policy sets out clearly a system of rewards and sanctions. A separate anti-bullying policy makes clear that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated. Staff are trained to recognise and deal with bullying. On the rare occasions that bullying occurs, it is dealt with effectively. Senior leaders, pastoral staff and senior pupils work cohesively to maintain high standards of behaviour. Pupils behave well in lessons, in activities and in their daily interactions in and around the school. Pupils are supervised through the appropriate deployment of suitably qualified staff.
34. Leaders have implemented effective procedures to promote pupils' safety on site. Buildings and grounds are well maintained. Suitable measures are in place to minimise the risk of fire. Fire drills are held regularly. Evacuation routes are signposted clearly, and fire safety equipment is maintained regularly. A range of staff, including nurses, mental health nurses, a physiotherapist, a qualified counsellor and doctors operate within the health centre to cater for pupils' medical and mental health needs.
35. The school provides high-quality sleeping and living accommodation for boarders, including secure and safe storage for individual possessions. Boarders have ready access to staff for help if required. As a result, boarders feel confident and safe within their boarding houses.
36. Staff are rigorous in completing the admission register with all of the required information, and in informing the local authority when pupils join or leave the school. The school's system records the whereabouts of all pupils during the day and during boarding time.

## **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing**

37. All the relevant Standards are met.

## Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

38. The school prepares pupils well for life in British society. International pupils speak positively about the ways in which they were introduced to British life via trips in a pre-session course. The PSHE programme also supports pupils' human, social and economic education. For example, pupils develop monetary awareness, such as the use of ISAs and savings accounts.
39. There is a strong emphasis on developing skills for independent living in the boarding houses. Leadership skills are developed in many areas, for example through the well-supported CCF where older pupils take on the responsibility of training younger pupils. Pupils develop an understanding of civil and criminal law and a knowledge of, and respect for, public services in England through the PSHE programme or, for example, through IB philosophy which examines political ideologies and human rights. Services in chapel develop pupils' awareness of different religious beliefs, while also reflecting the school's Christian foundation. Here, pupils are challenged to consider moral issues, for example, by exploring the difference between legality and what is right, and the relationship between legality and power.
40. One of the school's four pillars, which are the foundation for the school's aims and values, is the development of a global community in which diversity is celebrated, a sense of community and inclusiveness is developed, and pupils are taught to respect themselves as well as each other. Pupils are proud to celebrate a range of cultures, for example, during events like the International Day where they learn from each other by sharing traditions and customs of their own cultures. The close bonds which develop within the boarding environment foster pupils' social and cultural understanding.
41. Pupils contribute positively to the local area and wider society. Volunteering is a key part of the co-curricular programme and life in the sixth form. The school holds a volunteering day where pupils engage in activities such as beach clearing and carrying out species surveys on the Quantocks. Pupils use their initiative in deciding how they might contribute. Charity work features strongly, whether through pupil-led initiatives during RAG week, a week of pupil-led fund raising for charity, working at a local food bank, or organising presents for children in need at Christmas. Pupils understand their social responsibility to help others and are also aware of how such involvement benefits them and enriches their own lives.
42. Leaders foster mutual respect in all aspects of school life and emphasise the importance of cherishing diversity. Pupils feel that the school is sending the right messages about inclusion and respect for each other which makes them feel valued. One of the responsibilities of the prefectorial body, for example, is to ensure that no member of the house sits on their own at mealtimes. Within the co-curricular activities programme, pupils join a range of societies and clubs that promote tolerance and respect.
43. Pupils develop their understanding of right and wrong and accept responsibility for their actions. Through effective tracking of rewards and sanctions, house tutorial programmes encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Lessons typically demonstrate that pupils accept responsibility for their own behaviour and show respect for others.
44. A comprehensive, up-to-date, and impartial careers guidance programme is in place which enables pupils to make informed choices about a broad range of career options. Pupils are given advice

about their GCSE options in Year 9 and sixth-form options in Year 11. Further guidance is provided in the sixth form through a UCAS fair, careers symposiums, external speakers and the tutorial system. Staff within the careers centre are also available to provide individual advice and guidance. Pupils who make use of these opportunities speak highly of the support and advice they receive. However, not all pupils engage with the careers department and resources provided, and leaders acknowledge the need to communicate more effectively what the school offers in terms of careers guidance to both pupils and their parents.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society**

**45. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

46. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Procedures, as outlined in the school's safeguarding policy, are implemented effectively. Pupils feel safe in school. Boarding houses are secure, and staff and pupils understand safeguarding protocols within the house. There is always an adult supervising in the boarding house. Boarders have access to an independent listener and external agencies, and there is an extensive list of staff to whom pupils can turn should they have any concerns. Pupils are given an induction on how to stay safe in town which includes raising awareness of contextual risks.
47. Training for safeguarding is thorough. At the start of each school year, staff receive detailed training, which is in line with local procedures and reflects the latest statutory guidance. Thereafter, staff knowledge and understanding of safeguarding is reinforced through regular reminders at staff briefings. Staff who are new to the school receive a thorough induction, which includes familiarisation with the school's safeguarding procedures, the staff code of conduct and whistleblowing procedures.
48. Staff are well informed about how to identify and deal with any safeguarding issues or concerns and are vigilant. There is also an effective system in place for raising low-level concerns about the behaviour of adults. Pupils know how to raise any concerns or worries they may have. Boarders are supervised at night, and pupils know how to contact staff if they need help.
49. Staff are alert to small changes in behaviour and appearance, and there are effective systems in place for them to share information in a timely way. This information is shared promptly between boarding and teaching staff so that appropriate support for pupils can be put in place. Concerns are carefully and suitably recorded and are dealt with appropriately by members of the safeguarding team. Effective use of the bullying and behaviour logs helps ensure that any potential safeguarding issues are identified at an early stage.
50. There are effective working arrangements with local safeguarding partners, including children's services and, when necessary, the police. Leaders and staff seek advice if necessary and understand their role in reporting any concerns to the appropriate agencies. Leaders contribute to multi-agency meetings, take advice and follow any guidance suggested.
51. Staff check the suitability of adults before they commence working at the school. The record of appointments accurately records the safeguarding checks that have been carried out.
52. Pupils are taught about internet safety and online dangers as part of their PSHE programme. They understand how to help keep themselves safe online and the risks of the internet. There are appropriate systems in place at school and in the boarding houses for filtering and monitoring online content.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

## School details

<b>School</b>	Taunton School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	933/6025
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1081420
<b>Address</b>	Taunton School Staplegrove Road Taunton Somerset TA2 6AD
<b>Phone number</b>	01823 703703
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@tauntonschool.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	tauntonschool.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Taunton School Educational Charity
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Mark Anderson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr James Johnson
<b>Age range</b>	8 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	736
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	385
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15 May 2023

## Information about the school

54. Taunton School is a co-educational boarding and day school located in Taunton, Somerset. The school comprises: a nursery, pre-prep and prep school, which were inspected separately; a senior school which includes a sixth form; Taunton School International (TSI) and Taunton School International Middle School (TSIMS). All parts of the school are located on the same 56-acre campus, apart from Taunton School International Middle School which occupies its own site three miles away in Kingston St Mary.
55. Taunton School International Middle School caters for up to 60 international pupils aged 8 to 14 who speak EAL and prepares them for entry to the prep school or senior school. Taunton School International caters for up to 85 British and international pupils offering one- and two-year intensive GCSE courses, which prepare pupils for entry to the sixth form, as well as pre-foundation and international foundation year courses which prepare pupils for direct entry to university. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors was appointed in November 2023.
56. There are five boarding houses in the senior school, three for male pupils and two for female pupils. In addition, Taunton School International Middle School has two boarding houses, one for male pupils and one for female pupils, as does Taunton School International.
57. The school has identified 158 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Three pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
58. English is an additional language for 165 pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to enable each pupil to embrace their individuality, explore their passions, and develop into confident and well-rounded adults ready to make a positive impact on the world. It seeks to develop in pupils a culture of ambition, a sense of belonging, a mindset for life, and to create a global community centred around the core values of humility, engagement and kindness.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

23 to 25 April 2024

60. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of a chapel service and tutorial periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

62. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)