

Dear Parents/Carers

As you will be aware, the academy had its full Ofsted inspection on Tuesday 16 and Wednesday 17 June. We are now able to share the report and let you know how pleased we are with the outcome of the inspection.

A reminder - schools no longer receive one overall grading, instead they receive gradings in several areas, for the academy, this was seven areas. Gradings have also changed from Outstanding, Good etc, there are now five gradings; and to achieve each of these gradings, all bullet points must be achieved within that section of the Ofsted toolkit. This is known as a "secure fit" model. To aid understanding I have made some comparisons to the old grading system below, but please use this with caution, as there is no formal comparison release from Ofsted (this is the widely used comparison but not from Ofsted itself).

Exceptional - this is for an exceedingly small percentage of schools where they are held up as a beacon nationally for practice in this area. Ofsted are clear that these grades will be rarely awarded.

Strong - this is an excellent outcome for schools, previously, this would have been similar to 'Outstanding'.

Expected - Ofsted describe 'Expected' as a "high bar." The new toolkit is designed to raise standards and so the expected standard is seen as "Good +" when making comparisons to previous gradings.

Needs attention - this is where a school needs to improve further to meet the expected standard. Any area graded needs attention and will require a monitoring visit to assess progress in that area.

Urgent attention - this is where there are significant concerns, and the school requires support.

I am pleased to share our gradings below for each area:

Safeguarding

Grade - Met

Safeguarding is only graded as 'Met' or 'Not Met'. The academy met the expectations required.

Curriculum & Teaching

Grade - Strong

Inspectors praised the consistency and high quality of teaching in the lessons. The report states *"...lessons that are of a consistently high standard in all subjects, enabling pupils to build deep and thorough knowledge throughout the curriculum. This gives pupils a solid base on which to build further knowledge in the future."*

Our Values:



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Inclusion

Grade - Strong

Inspectors praised how the vulnerable students at the academy are supported. This included SEND students, but also students such as Young Carers; Looked After Children; students with English as an Additional Language; students who join the academy late due to a difficult experience at their previous school, and a range of other vulnerabilities. This is not named within the report but the 'Gold Pathway' we have in place was seen as a particular strength. The report states ***"...leaders ensure that as pupils build their knowledge and skills or experience changing circumstances in their lives, these needs are reconsidered so that they continue to be supported in helpful ways. Leaders' approach to teaching pupils with SEND is grounded in the principle of equal access. They do not lower the bar for what pupils can aspire to achieve."***

Personal Development & Wellbeing

Grade - Strong

Inspectors praised the ethos of the academy and the work done by staff to provide students with a wide range of experiences during their time at the academy. The report states, ***"Personal development and wellbeing are central to this school's ethos."*** and ***"Pastoral support is highly effective. Leaders carefully consider what is in the best interests of the pupils in their care. One pupil echoed the views of many, saying 'It is the kindness of the teachers that makes us who we are.'"***

Achievement

Grade - Expected

There was an acceptance from the inspectors that contextually the academy performs very well, however, the toolkit is rigid in its comparison against national averages. We feel this is a fair judgement; there are subject areas where outcomes are strong, and some they are in line with national averages, so by following the toolkit, 'Expected' is a fair judgement. To achieve 'Strong' the academy will work towards all areas and groups of students being above national average, not just in line with them. The report states ***"Most pupils at The Sutton Academy attain in line with national averages in public examinations. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities."***

Attendance & Behaviour

Grade - Expected

Behaviour was praised at the academy, the barrier to achieving Strong in this area was student attendance. This has improved this academic year but is still below national averages. Against similar schools the academy's performance is in line, but we will continue to work hard to move this area into the Strong category. I am most proud about how the inspectors describe the students. The report states ***"Pupils at The Sutton Academy are universally polite and cooperative. They behave with kindness and respect and speak highly of the positive encouragement that they receive from staff."***

Leadership & Governance

Grade - Expected

The toolkit is clear, that to achieve 'Strong', all areas need to be graded 'Strong' or to be rapidly improving. Attendance is currently the main barrier to achieving a 'Strong' judgement in this area, but it is something we will continue to work hard on. The report states ***"Leaders use research to find the most successful improvement strategies nationally. This enables them to carefully select what is best for their school. Owing to this, many of their strategies are having a positive impact."***

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Post 16 Provision

Grade - Expected

The support provided for Sixth Form is positive and the outcomes in Vocational qualifications are praised, work is ongoing to move A-Level outcomes above national averages. This is a positive grading and a nice way to praise the work the Sixth Form Leadership Team have completed before it closes. The report states ***“Students in the sixth form are well prepared and supported to take their next steps, whether that be higher education, employment, or training. They receive one-to-one advice about future careers and benefit from work-related learning opportunities. This helps students to prepare for the world of work.”***

In the weeks running up to the inspection several articles were published in the ‘Times Educational Supplement’ about how the new Ofsted Toolkit was unfairly disadvantaging schools where students make good progress but due to a lack of the Progress 8 measure, were only being judged on attainment. There was no Progress 8 last academic year and there will be no Progress 8 for the Year 11 cohort finishing this academic year. To address this, Ofsted will include comparisons on how schools perform against similar schools from September 2026 onwards. It is a shame this is not in place now, as the academy scores very well against similar schools. When compared with similar schools using the ‘schools like yours’ benchmark, the academy performs exceptionally strongly and is amongst the highest-performing schools nationally.

Achieving three gradings of ‘Strong’ is a fantastic outcome and something we are immensely proud of; however, our focus remains on providing the best possible education for our students, rather than on Ofsted inspection outcomes.

We will continue to work hard on the next steps identified below, which are already part of the academy’s three-year action plan decided upon last academic year.

- Leaders should ensure that the academic support strategies they use to raise achievement for pupils and students are effective across all subjects and key stages.
- Leaders should reinforce their efforts to address persistent absence to secure high rates of attendance for all pupils.

If you have any queries regarding the Ofsted Report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Mr. P Willerton
Principal

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