

Inspection of The Sutton Academy

Elton Head Road, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 5AU

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 June 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

At The Sutton Academy, pupils, and students in the sixth form, flourish. They benefit from a well-thought-out, ambitious curriculum that gives them the rich knowledge that they need to embark on their futures. Leaders and teachers expect pupils to succeed. They achieve well.

The overwhelming majority of pupils are kind to each other. Pupils were adamant that this is a school where they are accepted for who they are. Differences between people are celebrated. Discriminatory behaviour is rare within this close-knit, respectful community. As such, pupils feel safe and happy at school. They are free to be themselves. Teachers respond swiftly to resolve any occasional bullying.

Relationships between pupils and their teachers are strong. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and during social times reflects leaders' high expectations. Each classroom is an oasis of calm where pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learn with fervour.

The strong personal development curriculum affords pupils regular opportunities to discuss and debate issues that are relevant to their lives. Pupils grow in confidence. They appreciate the extensive enrichment programme that is available to them daily. Pupils were effusive about the variety of clubs and activities on offer.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have transformed the quality of education that pupils, and students in the sixth form, receive. Passionate about addressing disadvantage, leaders are unswerving in their commitment to ensure that all pupils and students study a sufficiently broad, knowledge-rich curriculum.

The curriculum from key stage 3 to key stage 5 is meticulously planned. Leaders have thought deeply about the knowledge that pupils and students need to learn in each subject and how this knowledge underpins the development of more difficult concepts. Subject leaders have carefully mapped this knowledge so that all teachers are clear about what they need to teach and when it should be taught. This means that across the school, all pupils and students, irrespective of their background, ability or SEND, access the same ambitious curriculum.

Teachers are subject experts. They deliver the curriculum consistently well, selecting appropriate activities to help pupils to apply their knowledge to more sophisticated ideas. Teachers are adept at developing pupils' general and subject-specific vocabulary. Pupils feel empowered. They learn well. This is reflected in the high-quality work that they produce.

The strength in curriculum design has enabled subject leaders to refine their approaches to assessment so that teachers can ascertain how well pupils are

learning the knowledge that they need. Following a series of lessons, most teachers use assessment effectively to identify and address pupils' misconceptions. However, sometimes, pupils do not recall essential knowledge with the fluency that leaders intend. This is because occasionally, within lessons, some teachers do not check accurately enough that pupils' learning is secure before they move on.

Leaders identify pupils' additional needs with speed and accuracy. This means that teachers are furnished quickly with the information that they need to support pupils with SEND to succeed. Students in the sixth form with SEND follow aspirational courses.

Leaders have successfully prioritised reading across the school. They ensure that pupils access a range of diverse, high-quality texts. These texts develop pupils' interest in reading, while at the same time challenging cultural stereotypes and promoting equality. Staff are well trained to teach pupils and students to read.

Leaders have comprehensive systems in place to support pupils who find reading difficult. However, while most pupils improve their reading ability, these systems do not identify the precise deficits that some pupils have in their phonics knowledge. This means that a small number of pupils do not receive the most appropriate support in the first instance. They are not helped to catch up as quickly as they should be. This affects how well a few pupils access the wider curriculum.

Pupils' positive attitudes to learning mean that they can learn without disruption. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, attend school regularly.

Leaders' aspirations for pupils are reflected in the well-planned opportunities that they provide for pupils' personal development. In particular, leaders strive to ensure that pupils learn how to be respectful, tolerant citizens in modern society. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the Rainbow Club where they can express themselves openly. Support for pupils' mental well-being is strong.

Similarly, in the sixth form, students value the level of tailored support and guidance that they receive from staff about all aspects of their learning and development. Staff are fastidious in ensuring that students choose the most appropriate sixth-form courses. This is so that students gain the qualifications that they need for their next stage of education, employment or training.

Trustees have been instrumental in supporting leaders to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. Staff feel invested in. They value the time that leaders have dedicated to their professional development. Staff appreciate leaders' consideration of their well-being. Staff morale is high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that a strong culture of safeguarding permeates the school. In addition to the comprehensive safeguarding training that they receive, staff know pupils and their families well. This enables staff to identify quickly when a pupil may be at risk of harm. Staff are in tune with the risks that pupils may face in the local community. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure that pupils get the timely support that they need.

In the sixth form, systems for keeping students safe are equally effective. Strong communication between staff means that leaders are knowledgeable about the potential dangers that vulnerable students in the sixth form may encounter.

Leaders place great emphasis on ensuring that the personal development curriculum teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, teachers do not check accurately enough that pupils' component knowledge is secure before moving on. On occasion, some pupils do not recall knowledge as fluently as leaders intend. Leaders should ensure that all staff are trained equally well to use assessment strategies in lessons effectively to address pupils' misconceptions.
- Leaders' systems for identifying pupils who are behind with their reading do not enable them to pinpoint with accuracy the deficits in pupils' phonic knowledge. Sometimes, a small number of pupils across the school do not receive the most appropriate support to help them to catch up quickly. This hinders some of these pupils from accessing the wider curriculum. Leaders should ensure that they identify the precise gaps in pupils' reading knowledge so that these pupils can be supported to catch up quickly.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	136141
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10238132
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1380
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	143
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Peter Winter
Principal	Paul Willerton
Website	www.thesuttonacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 December 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Leaders use alternative provision for a small number of pupils at two registered providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the second routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, the senior leadership team, middle leaders and a range of teaching and support staff. An inspector spoke with four members of the board of trustees, including the chair and vice-chair of the trust.

- An inspector also met with a representative of the local authority.
- As part of this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography, history, and art and design. Inspectors met with subject leaders to discuss their curriculums, visited some lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and teachers.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from Years 7 to 10 and groups of students from Year 12. Inspectors also observed breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding procedures and the checks made on staff. Inspectors met with leaders, staff and pupils to evaluate the culture of safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, the school development plans, self-evaluation documents, the curriculum, minutes from meetings of the board of trustees, and behaviour records.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff and the responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.
- Inspectors also considered the views of the parents and carers who responded to Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments received via the free-text facility.

Inspection team

Rachel Goodwin, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Karen Pomeroy	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Murphy	Ofsted Inspector
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