

The Sutton Academy

Elton Head Road, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 5AU

Inspection dates

7–8 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In 2015 and 2016, pupils' progress and attainment were significantly below the national average. Pupils currently in the school do not make enough good progress from their various starting points.
- Teaching is not consistently good or better. A strong focus on classroom routines and rigorous checking of quality has led to some improvement. Teachers' planning and feedback do not consistently stretch and challenge pupils, particularly the most able, to secure the knowledge and skills that they need to excel.
- Pupils' progress in science is slow. Although standards are rising, they are not in line with standards in English and mathematics.
- Strategies to improve standards for disadvantaged pupils are not fully in place. Differences remain between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally, although diminishing.
- Teachers do not consistently follow school policies for questioning, marking and feedback.
- There is insufficient focus on developing pupils' numeracy and problem-solving skills across all areas of the curriculum. This results in an over-reliance on calculators and an over-dependence on teachers.
- Students studying academic courses in the sixth form do not make as much progress as they should, because teaching is not consistently good.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors have improved the ethos and culture of the school since the last inspection. They know the school's strengths and weaknesses. The actions that they have taken are strengthening teaching and accelerating pupils' progress.
- Staff morale is high. Staff feel cared for and increasingly challenged and supported by senior leaders.
- Personal development and welfare are good and have improved since the last inspection. Vulnerable pupils are very well cared for. Behaviour has improved. Attendance is above average and improving for all groups of pupils. Pupils are respectful towards one another.
- A range of opportunities are provided for pupils to learn about British values. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in order to accelerate progress and raise standards for pupils in all subjects, but particularly in science, by:
 - using accurate assessment information to plan suitably challenging work, particularly for the most able
 - planning learning opportunities that require pupils to think for themselves, solve problems and take risks, so that they develop increased confidence in their learning
 - providing opportunities for pupils to develop and apply numeracy skills across all areas of the curriculum
 - ensuring greater consistency in the implementation of the school's marking and feedback policy, so that all pupils benefit from useful advice about how to improve their learning
 - ensuring that all teachers use effective questioning to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding and develop their thinking skills.
- Further improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils by:
 - setting pupils ambitious yet realistic targets, based on a clear and accurate understanding of what they can and need to do to improve
 - ensuring that aspirations are high and that pupils are able to access the full range of curriculum choices at key stage 4
 - analysing the impact of strategies using pupil premium funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to others nationally across all subjects.
- Raise standards in the sixth form, particularly in academic A Levels, by ensuring that:
 - pupils are guided onto the right courses
 - teaching in the sixth form is consistently good or better.

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

- Leadership and management require improvement, because many of the actions taken by leaders and governors since the last inspection have not yet had a sufficiently positive impact on teaching, which is not yet consistently good. Outcomes for pupils are still too low.
- Leaders are not securing rapid enough progress for disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able. While the use of pupil premium funding has made some improvement in outcomes for these pupils, they are not achieving well enough.
- Since her appointment in November 2014, the principal, with the able support of the governors, has developed a culture of school improvement. This is aimed at eliminating underperformance arising from low aspirations, weak teaching and a curriculum that was insufficiently aspirational for many pupils. There has been a substantial turnover of staff and a restructure of the school's leadership team.
- Leaders and staff at all levels are committed to the school's vision of high expectations and aspirations for all pupils. They recognise the need to raise standards and improve outcomes more quickly. Levels of accountability have increased, but staff say that the many changes that have taken place are for the better. Staff morale is high. Staff have a strong ambition for The Sutton Academy to become a good school. This is shared by governors.
- A high priority has been placed on improving teaching. Teachers are routinely held to account through the school's appraisal system for the quality of their teaching and the progress that pupils make. Leaders make good use of information from regular checks on teaching and learning to develop teachers' skills and improve their effectiveness. Teachers say that they appreciate the support that they receive to help them to develop their skills further.
- Leaders have a clear recruitment strategy to ensure that pupils receive more consistent, high-quality teaching. A number of teachers who are relatively new to the profession have been appointed. They are well supported and appreciate the mentoring that they receive. The quality of senior and middle leadership is improving as a result of the school's investment in the professional development of leaders at all levels.
- Leaders have improved the curriculum, and it is now broad and balanced. They have taken action to improve underperforming subjects and created a key stage 3 curriculum that enables pupils to make good progress as soon as they start in Year 7. The curriculum now meets the needs of the majority of pupils and enables them to be better prepared for the next stage in their education, employment or training.
- The extensive range of extra-curricular activities provide pupils with many opportunities to participate, for example in orchestra, choir, a range of sports teams, languages, cryptography, drama, dance and enterprise clubs. Pupils are active in fundraising for different charities, and GCSE pupils have the opportunity to attend after-school classes in all subjects to help them to catch up on lost learning. Pupils say that they appreciate the extra opportunities and help that they receive from their teachers.

- The recently appointed leader for special educational needs is beginning to improve the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She has recently introduced targeted support for pupils who need to catch up, and there are signs of positive impact in pupils' current work.
- Pupils develop a clear understanding of British values. They find out about diversity, equality, democracy and more through assemblies, enrichment lessons and their tutor groups. Pupils understand what it is to be a good citizen.
- The additional funding to help pupils in their English and/or mathematics at the start of Year 7 is being used effectively to accelerate the progress that they make during their first term at the school.
- Almost all parents and pupils say that the school has improved in the past two years. They especially value the work of leaders to increase the level of expectation, particularly in improving behaviour. Year 9 pupils told inspectors, 'pupils' attitudes towards each other have improved and pupils are now more supportive of one other'.
- Leaders' strong focus on the benefits of good attendance and the development of effective strategies to tackle persistent absenteeism have contributed to improved attendance for all groups of pupils.

Governance of the school

- The school benefits from strong governance. Governors hold the principal to account and offer support. They have recognised the need for a greater drive to raise standards and to improve progress, to compensate for the legacy of underachievement.
- Since the last inspection, governors have put a good deal of emphasis on further developing their effectiveness in challenging and supporting school leaders. They regularly audit their skills, participate in relevant training and work closely with the principal.
- Individual governors have a wide range of skills, expertise and extensive knowledge of the local community. Governors are aware of their responsibilities and have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have helped to develop the vision, ethos and culture of the school, and this has led to the improvements since the last inspection.
- Governors have helped to create an increasingly outward-looking school at which partnership work is the norm. They seek external validation of the judgements of senior and middle leaders relating to the quality of assessment information and the quality of teaching. Opportunities for staff to share good practice have been expanded through the school's partnership work with the Dean Trust and Ashton on Mersey Teaching School.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- This is as a result of strong leadership and robust systems. The school adheres to all training requirements, including the 'Prevent' duty, which aims to keep pupils safe from

the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

- All required checks are carried out when new staff are recruited.
- The designated lead for child protection is knowledgeable and works well with outside agencies. All incidents or disclosures are followed up thoroughly.
- Pupils feel confident about personal safety, particularly about keeping themselves safe online, and have faith in the school staff to support them should problems arise. Systems for securing the safety of pupils are supported by detailed policies and procedures that staff use effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, although improving, is not yet securing consistently good progress for pupils across year groups and across the curriculum.
- Not all teachers take enough account of what pupils already know and can do, and they either give all pupils in the class the same work, which is either too easy or too hard for some of them, or they fail to encourage pupils to challenge themselves. As a result, some pupils make less progress than they otherwise could. During the inspection, this was seen in a number of science lessons and in some mathematics lessons.
- While teachers' support for less-able pupils in lessons is effective, the strategies used are not doing enough to stretch the most able. Too often, these pupils have to wait until their classmates catch up, rather than being given work that deepens their understanding of subjects.
- Time is not always used productively and, as a consequence, the pace of learning slows for some pupils. For example, Year 11 pupils solving probability questions using tree diagrams were all doing the same question at the same time from the whiteboard. Some pupils made limited progress, because the teacher had not checked what pupils could already do and had not made extension work available at that stage of the lesson.
- Not all teachers are consistently following the school's policy on marking and feedback. It was clear, during the inspection, from inspectors' analysis of the work in pupils' books that school leaders have placed a strong emphasis on improving the quality of written marking and feedback. Pupils say that it is helping them to understand where they have gone wrong and how to improve their work. There remain some inconsistencies. When this is the case, pupils' progress is not as strong as it could be.
- When learning is effective, the teachers encourage pupils to attempt work that challenges them to move to the next level. A good example of this was seen in a Year 10 German lesson when pupils, without prompting, naturally selected an activity at or above their minimum target level. The teacher had identified several pupils who needed additional support and had planned a completely different activity to enable these pupils to succeed and to make good progress.
- Pupils in key stage 3 are making good progress, particularly in Year 7 and especially in English, because information about individual pupils is being used to target additional

literacy support and intervention as soon as they arrive at the school.

- Leaders have worked hard to secure greater accuracy of assessment information. The processes for moderating assessments, both internally within departments and externally with a range of partners, are constantly developing. Teachers in all subjects are working hard to assess the skills that pupils require to be successful at GCSE, from Year 7 onwards.
- Some teachers have high expectations and use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding. They check pupils' knowledge well and adapt activities accordingly. This was particularly effective in lessons observed in English and languages. In a Year 7 Spanish lesson, pupils were being encouraged to develop independent learning skills, to use dictionaries and to ask each other questions rather than relying solely on the teacher. Pupils worked well together in groups, checking their own and others' work. The teacher's effective questioning skills enabled her to assess progress accurately and encouraged pupils to think, to practise their speaking and listening skills, and to translate each others' responses.
- The school promotes reading well. Most-able pupils read with fluency and expression. They show a good understanding of the books that they are reading, which are appropriate for their age and ability. Less-able pupils receive additional support with their reading, and this is effective in helping them to become more confident and to enjoy reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders and teachers have worked hard and with success to change the culture of the school, to raise aspirations and to ensure that pupils feel safe to flourish personally, emotionally and academically.
- Every individual is valued and is recognised as different but equal. Pupils are taught to respect each other and to celebrate difference.
- Pupils who spoke to inspectors either formally or informally have a good understanding of various types of bullying, including homophobia and cyber bullying. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, both inside and outside school.
- Leaders support pupils well in the various forms of alternative provision. They check to ensure that the provision is making a positive difference to pupils' personal well-being and academic progress.
- Pupils are courteous, polite, well mannered and considerate. These positive attributes support their learning. Occasionally, pupils do not contribute as fully when their work is less interesting and challenging.
- Most teaching and support staff who completed the online survey said that the school keeps its pupils safe. Almost all the parents who responded to the survey were positive about the school and how it supports pupils and keeps them safe. Inspectors' observations in school and analysis of records confirmed that it is a safe environment

for young people.

- Assemblies are used well to raise aspirations and celebrate pupils' success, and pupils appreciate how their teachers bring important issues to life. An assembly about working hard, persevering and the importance of teamwork was linked to Roger Bannister's efforts to run a mile in under four minutes, despite expert opinion that it could not be done. Pupils are routinely rewarded for good attendance, academic excellence and positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils respond well and are rightly proud of their achievements.
- Pupils are well prepared to progress to the next stage of education, training or employment. A comprehensive careers strategy focuses on raising pupils' future aspirations when they leave school, including the 'Aspire to be...' programme. This gives pupils the opportunity to meet and listen to representatives from a range of different careers to discuss the realities of the role.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills, including through being members of the pupil council, raising funds for charity and acting as sports team leaders. These help to prepare them well for the future. The proportion of pupils who progress to education, training and employment at the end of Year 11 is in line with the national average.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In lessons, most pupils engage well with their learning. When teachers have high expectations and encourage academic resilience, pupils respond positively, work hard and achieve more as a result. Low-level, off-task behaviour arises occasionally when teachers fail to plan work at the right level of challenge or when pupils are insufficiently interested in their learning. School leaders place a strong emphasis on readiness for learning, positive behaviour and punctuality. Staff implement the behaviour policy consistently, and pupils and staff told inspectors that behaviour had improved over the past two years. Consequently, exclusions have been reduced.
- Pupils like coming to school, and this is reflected in the improving attendance figures. Attendance overall is in line with national average and has improved steadily over the past two years. The proportion of pupils whose learning is affected by persistent absence is decreasing.
- Pupils of all ages socialise and behave well outside the classroom. They told inspectors that their school is one at which the majority of pupils get on well with each other. They have positive relationships with adults and are very welcoming to visitors. They speak very positively about their school and the opportunities that it offers them. Those parents who answered Ofsted's survey agreed with this view.
- Pupils take pride in their uniform and in their school environment. The school is litter- and graffiti-free and well looked after, and work in books and files is generally well presented.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision receive appropriate support and access to suitable learning experiences, including from different agencies. This helps them to deal with the particular challenges that they may face and to stay safe.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2015 and 2016, Year 11 pupils made significantly less progress in a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics, than other pupils nationally. The recent improvements in teaching and changes to the curriculum are beginning to accelerate pupils' progress. However, the school's own assessment information shows that, for current pupils, progress is not consistently good, particularly in science. For the most able, it is not good enough in a number of subjects. The progress of all disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, is not consistently good. Leaders' actions have not sufficiently turned round the legacy of underachievement to enable them to catch up with other pupils nationally.
- An inappropriate curriculum and lack of effective support in the past have resulted in pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities not making good progress by the time they leave Year 11. Provision has improved under recent new leadership. The special educational needs coordinator uses performance information more sharply to address pupils' needs and evaluates the impact of support programmes to ensure that they are working.
- Numeracy across the curriculum is insufficiently developed. During the inspection, pupils were seen routinely using calculators for even the simplest sums. When they used calculators inaccurately and made errors, they were unable to spot their errors because of their weak numeracy skills.
- The school's assessment system is increasingly being used to flag up underperformance, and this information is being used to identify where additional support is required. The range of additional support has greatly increased over the past two years in all year groups, and leaders are beginning to evaluate the impact of this additional support on outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders use the additional funding for Year 7 pupils who have underperformed in the past to buy additional resources to help them to make progress, particularly in reading. There has been a strong focus on promoting literacy across all areas of the curriculum, and inspectors saw evidence in lessons and in pupils' books.
- Leaders encourage pupils to monitor their own progress across subjects. The majority of pupils know their minimum and aspirational targets, and understand the difference between them. Where learning is strongest, pupils are opting for the most challenging work when teachers provide them with the opportunity to do so.
- Work in books shows that some pupils are now making more rapid progress over time in some subjects such as English and languages. Most-able pupils do not make rapid progress in a number of subjects, including in mathematics, and pupils' overall progress is less strong in science.
- Pupils' progress has started to accelerate in key stage 3 as a result of the implementation of the new curriculum. Many pupils in the current Year 7 are making good progress from their starting points in English and mathematics.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is not consistently good. As a result, over time, students' outcomes are variable. Results in A Levels in 2016 were weaker than expected, with results in psychology, English, media, technology and sports studies being significantly below average. However, there were some applied general subjects, including business studies, computer science and health studies, in which results in 2016 were strong.
- Leaders have not ensured that all students are guided onto the most appropriate courses. For example, some pupils have been allowed to study courses when they have not met course requirements. This means that they have struggled with the work, for example in A Level science.
- Students report that they enjoy being in the sixth form. They told inspectors that they felt well supported and that staff worked hard for them. Leaders and staff provide high-quality pastoral care for students, based on a very thorough and detailed knowledge of each student's needs and aspirations. Students feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe.
- Students who retake their GCSEs in English and mathematics significantly improve their results while in the sixth form.
- The school engages with local employers, industries and universities to help students to understand the wide range of opportunities that are available to them in employment, training and higher education. Students receive careers advice and guidance that are tailored to their individual talents and aspirations. Students have high aspirations which are supported and driven by staff. Many go on to study at university.

School details

Unique reference number	136141
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10024092

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,208
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	135
Appropriate authority	Governing body
Chair	Jette Burford
Principal	Alison Sherman
Telephone number	01744 678859
Website	http://www.thesuttonacademy.org.uk/
Email address	alison.sherman@thesuttonacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–21 January 2015

Information about this school

- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish online.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- A small number of pupils access education off-site at St Helen’s Pupil Referral Unit, Launchpad, Instant Training and Achievement for Sport. All are run by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above

the national average.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium, at around 45% of the cohort, is well above the national average.
- In 2016, the academy did not meet the government's floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons in 44 classes, accompanied in six of these by three senior leaders. They spoke with pupils and scrutinised their work. They also observed pupils' behaviour at break, lunchtimes, at the start and end of the school day, and as they moved around the school during the day. An inspector attended a Year 9 assembly.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, and with a group of recently qualified teachers. They also met with five members of the governing body and four groups of pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation document, minutes of meetings of the governing body, records and policies relating to safeguarding, and the school's tracking information on pupils' behaviour, attendance, progress and attainment.
- Inspectors spoke with staff and also took account of 27 responses by staff to an online questionnaire undertaken during the inspection.
- Inspectors took into account the 58 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View.

Inspection team

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Emma Gregory	Ofsted Inspector
Ahmed Marikar	Her Majesty's Inspector
Michael Holland	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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