

# The Sutton Academy

Elton Head Road, St Helens, Merseyside, WA9 5AU

**Inspection dates** 14–15 March 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- While there is evidence of recent improvements, students' progress is generally below average.
- Weaknesses remain in students' achievement in mathematics and humanities. The sixth form requires improvement.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good or better and some inadequate teaching remains.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes in lessons are not always sufficiently positive to maintain a good pace of learning.
- The actions of leaders and managers, including governors, have not had sufficient impact to ensure that students across the academy make good progress.

### The school has the following strengths

- Students behave well around the academy, even in the difficult circumstances created by significant building work. They feel safe and are very positive about the new accommodation.
- Teachers plan lessons that take account of different ability levels in the class. Students learn well when reviewing other students' work and considering how it could be made better.
- Leaders and managers have successfully improved the quality of teaching. This has led to better progress for current students and GCSE results in 2012 that were better than those in 2011.
- The academy's leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and of the academy's overall strengths and weaknesses.

## Information about this inspection

- During this inspection, inspectors observed 43 lessons, including eight that were observed jointly with senior staff at the academy. They also made shorter visits to several other lessons to look at students' books.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Principal, members of the governing body, a representative of St Helens local authority, staff and students.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including that relating to the work of the governing body and the achievement, behaviour and safety of students. They took account of 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Paul Chambers, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Additional Inspector
Mary Liptrot	Additional Inspector
David Woodhouse	Additional Inspector
John Dunne	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Sutton Academy is larger than most secondary schools.
- The academy is sponsored by St Helens College and Edge Hill University.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and those from services families) is high compared with the national average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is above average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- There are more boys than girls in the academy.
- Almost all students are White British.
- A small number of students attend off-site provision, run by Aspire and/or Launchpad, for two or three days per week; these students attend work placements and receive training in key skills. About 50 students in each of Years 10 and 11 attend St Helens College for one day per week to follow courses in hair and beauty, construction or engineering.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further, by:
  - eliminating inadequate teaching
  - giving more emphasis to improving students' writing and speaking skills
  - ensuring that more students contribute fully to the lesson.
- Improve students' achievement, particularly in the sixth form and in mathematics and humanities.
- Increase the proportion of students gaining the highest A\* and A grades in their examinations.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels monitor carefully how well teachers implement policies designed to improve students' communication and mathematical skills.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students enter the academy with attainment that is below average. GCSE examination results are below average in most subjects and particularly so for the proportion of students gaining the highest A\* and A grades.
- Most progress measures are below average. In 2012, while the proportion of students making the expected progress in English broadly matched the national picture, the corresponding figure in mathematics was much lower. Few students made progress that exceeded national expectations. Students following humanities subjects make less progress than similar students in other schools.
- Inspection evidence, supported by robust data provided by the school, indicates that current students are making better progress than those who have recently completed their examinations.
- The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs, like other groups, requires improvement. School data show that current students receiving extra support are making better progress in English than mathematics.
- The gap between the average point score (a measure of attainment) of those known to be eligible for the pupil premium and other students in English has been less than the national figure for each of the last two years, and narrowed in 2012. In mathematics, the gap was wider than the national figure in 2011 but narrower in 2012.
- Leaders have identified that, in 2012, some of the students attending courses at St Helens College did not achieve sufficiently well. They have ensured that current students are following suitable courses that they are on track to gain appropriately demanding qualifications.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. In 2012, A-level students made inadequate progress; inspection evidence suggests that current students are making better progress but this has yet to be established as a clear pattern over time.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- While the majority of teaching seen during the inspection was good or better, a substantial minority of teaching requires improvement and some inadequate teaching remains. Inspectors saw more good teaching in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than in Key Stage 3. Evidence from joint lesson observations suggests that the academy's leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching; moreover, the proportion of good or better teaching seen during the inspection is broadly in line with the academy's own records.
- Teachers form good relationships with students and most lessons take place in a calm atmosphere. They plan activities that take account of the different abilities in the class. In many cases, they help students' learning by giving them opportunities to review other students' work and assess it against set criteria.
- Where teaching is strongest, the students are actively engaged and contribute significantly to their own learning, teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and have high expectations of what students can achieve. For example, in a Year 7 music lesson, the teacher's high expectations helped to maintain an excellent pace of learning; all students were fully involved and worked together well to produce a four-person percussion piece in limited time.
- In weaker lessons, teachers focus their planning on teaching rather than students' learning. As a result, students have few opportunities to discuss and develop their ideas. Where teaching is less inspiring, some students are reluctant to volunteer answers or respond in detail to set tasks.
- Teachers are aware of their responsibility to develop students' language, communication and mathematical skills in their subject teaching. For example, inspectors saw examples of teachers encouraging students to read and giving opportunities for extended writing. However, in some lessons, teachers miss opportunities to develop students' writing or speaking skills or their use of

technical vocabulary. Across the curriculum, evidence of the academy's focus on language and communication is more evident than its focus on mathematics.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** requires improvement

- While most students are cooperative in lessons, a minority lack the drive and enthusiasm needed to do their very best.
- Students behave well around the academy; they move calmly between lessons and make good use of the social areas offered by the academy's new accommodation. They dress smartly and show good personal qualities.
- The number of exclusions from the academy is low and staff have successfully reduced the number of incidents of poor behaviour that require intervention. However, inspection evidence, including from the academy's records and responses to the staff questionnaire, indicate that some poor behaviour remains.
- Students feel safe in the academy. They know about different forms of bullying and say that bullying rarely takes place. They know who to turn to if they feel vulnerable or other students make them unhappy.
- Attendance is below average. More students are persistently absent than in most schools. The academy has devoted considerable resources to improving attendance and recent figures indicate that they are beginning to have an impact.
- Students who attend provision run by Aspire and/or Launchpad appreciate the opportunity to undertake work experience and gain basic skills in a non-school setting. Some report that the alternative provision has helped them to improve their attendance and behaviour. The academy makes appropriate arrangements for monitoring the well-being and attendance of all students attending lessons and training off-site.

### **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- While students' achievement has improved overall, achievement in mathematics and humanities is still not as good as it should be. Nevertheless, in 2012, mathematics results improved and considerably more students achieved the expected progress than previously.
- Leaders and managers are aware that recent provision and outcomes in the sixth form have not been good enough and that, in 2012, results in the sixth form did not show the same improvement as results at GCSE. They have responded by strengthening leadership and providing better information, advice and guidance for students entering the sixth form. As a result, more students are suitably qualified for the courses they are following, attendance is better and more students are persevering with their studies.
- The Principal, supported by a revamped senior team, has a clear vision for how the academy can improve. His drive and commitment have helped to tackle underperformance and have generated a positive attitude among staff: staff responding to the inspection questionnaire say they are proud to work at the academy and know what they are trying to achieve.
- Senior leaders are realistic in their evaluation of the academy. They recognise where improvements are needed and have appropriate plans to improve provision further. Staff responsible for subject areas are increasingly accountable for the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their areas of responsibility. Leaders and managers at all levels need to ensure that policies to improve students' communication and literacy skills are applied consistently.
- Leaders have allocated the pupil premium funding in a range of areas, including additional staffing to support literacy development and to ensure that the curriculum meets students' individual needs. They have monitored the impact of the additional funding on the performance of the eligible students but have undertaken less analysis of whether attainment gaps have

narrowed. However, the academy's careful monitoring of the performance of different groups demonstrates a suitable commitment to promoting equality of opportunity.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 includes planned opportunities for students to develop their study skills and reflect on how they learn most effectively. In Key Stage 4, students can select from an appropriate range of academic and work-related options. The range of courses offered in the sixth form generally meets students' needs but remains under review. After-school activities, many based around the academy's sports specialism, help students to develop their personal qualities, such as working with others. The time allocated to morning registration is not always used effectively.
  - The use of early entry for GCSE examinations may have contributed to more students gaining grade Cs, without a corresponding increase in the proportion of students gaining the highest A\* and A grades. This year, the academy has reduced the numbers of students entered early.
  - The small number of parents who completed the online questionnaire have mixed views of the academy, although almost all agree that the academy keeps them well informed about the progress their children are making. One parent raised an issue concerning provision in the sixth form and this was raised, in confidence, with the Principal.
  - In-school programmes to develop teaching further are well organised and have had an impact on increasing the proportion of good or better teaching. A focus on catering for the needs of different abilities within the class has led to improved practice in the classroom, especially in Key Stage 4. Where teaching is not consistently good or better, teachers are given additional support and/or clear targets for improvement. Pay rises are only approved for those staff who can demonstrate strong classroom performance.
  - The academy's sponsors provide a range of support. For example, St Helens College has provided support for developing the curriculum in computer science and vocational subjects in the sixth form; Edge Hill University offers support for mathematics staffing and contributes to sixth form students' enrichment time through the Tomorrow's Teachers scheme. The academy retains connections with St Helens local authority and, in consequence, benefits from the authority's expertise and links with other local schools.
  - **The governance of the school:**
    - Governors are knowledgeable and well informed about the academy. They provide suitable support and challenge and accept that the academy needs to improve students' achievement at GCSE and in the sixth form. They have a good understanding of the academy's priorities for improvement. They know where teaching is strongest and where it is weakest and ensure that additional pay is awarded to teachers only after a successful review of performance. Governors have kept track of the academy's finances through a time of considerable change in accommodation and staffing. They recognise the purpose of the pupil premium funding, but currently monitoring of its impact does not focus sufficiently on the attainment gaps with other groups.
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## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136141
<b>Local authority</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Inspection number</b>	399819

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1309
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	169
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jette Burford
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Terry
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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