

The Sutton Academy

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

Inspection dates

20–21 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Recent improvements made by academy leaders have not yet led to consistently good teaching or good student progress. Students' attainment remains below average.
- Students' progress and attainment in mathematics in 2014 were well below national average levels.
- Disadvantaged students and the most able do not achieve well enough.
- The quality of students' written work is not as good in all subjects as it is in English.
- The quality of teaching, although improving, remains too variable. Work set is not always matched to the different abilities of students, especially the most able.
- Questioning does not always check students' understanding, make students think, or develop their speaking skills.
- Although marking gives students clear guidance on how to improve their work, teachers do not always check that students respond well to this advice.
- Students' attitudes to learning, whilst generally positive, vary across the academy.
- Students have too few chances to learn about people from different cultures and backgrounds, in order for them to be better prepared for life in modern Britain.

The school has the following strengths

- The quality of teaching is improving. As a result, students' rates of progress, including those of disadvantaged students, are rising.
- Standards of attainment in English rose in 2014.
- Results achieved by students in the sixth form improved greatly in 2014.
- Students are proud of their academy. It is a calm and orderly place to learn, where most students work hard, and all feel safe.
- Parents are supportive of the academy and its leaders.
- Leaders at all levels, including governors, have acted effectively to improve the academy. They have raised the quality of teaching by eliminating any inadequate practice, and have improved students' behaviour. They have clear and convincing plans to improve the academy further.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in 47 lessons from Year 7 to Year 12. Five of these observations were made jointly with academy leaders. Year 13 students were sitting mock examinations during the inspection, so no observations were made involving this year group.
- The work in a sample of students' books and files was evaluated. Inspectors attended two assemblies and a number of tutor periods.
- The inspection team observed the behaviour of students in lessons, during lesson changeovers, at break and lunchtimes and as they left the academy at the end of the day.
- Inspectors took account of the 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the 61 questionnaires returned by staff.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, other academy leaders, including heads of subjects, the special educational needs coordinator and leaders of the sixth form. They spoke to governors; and to five groups of students of different ages and backgrounds. Inspectors also had a number of informal discussions with students at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including examination results and the academy's own records of students' progress. They scrutinised the academy's policies and procedures for keeping students safe. Inspectors examined records of students' attendance and behaviour, plans for improvement and documents used by leaders to check the quality of the work of academy staff.

Inspection team

Michael Phipps, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Haddock	Additional Inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional Inspector
Fiona Dixon	Additional Inspector
Alan Parkinson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is larger than the average sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those eligible for the pupil premium, at almost half of all students, is much higher than average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support students in the care of the local authority and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, at over a quarter of all students, is well above average.
- Eleven students from Year 8 to Year 11 attend work-related courses and other provision in different settings away from the academy. These are Launchpad, Instant Training, Aspire, the COOL project and Achievement for Sport. All are run by the local authority.
- The academy runs a Student Development Centre for vulnerable students. It provides support for students' literacy, numeracy, behaviour and social skills as well as break and lunchtime clubs.
- The Principal was appointed in November 2014 following a period of several months when the academy was led by an acting Principal.
- In 2013, the academy met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is at least consistently good, by making sure that:
 - work is set at the right level of difficulty for all students, especially the most able
 - planning includes activities in which students speak more in lessons, to develop their confidence and speaking skills
 - questioning in class checks effectively what students understand, makes them think, and requires them to explain their answers fully
 - teachers check that students' responses to marking help them to improve their work
 - students have opportunities to improve literacy skills in all their subjects, not just in English lessons.
- Raise students' achievement by making sure that:
 - students' progress and attainment in mathematics rise to at least national average levels
 - the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and their classmates continues to close rapidly
 - the most able students make good progress, so that more achieve the highest grades at GCSE.
- Plan how all students, including those in the sixth form, will develop a greater knowledge and understanding of people from different cultures and backgrounds, so that they are better prepared for life in modern Britain.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Academy leaders' recent actions to improve students' behaviour and the quality of teaching have not yet produced teaching which is consistently good. As a result, the progress of different groups of students across all subjects and age groups is not yet good. Students' attainment remains below national average levels.
- The new principal has an accurate view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses, and a calm determination to improve it further. She is well supported by her leadership team.
- Leaders have introduced more rigorous systems to check the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Teachers are set targets based on students' progress. Underperformance in teaching is tackled firmly. Staff are positive about the recent changes.
- Leaders spend pupil premium funding on extra staff for English and mathematics and on the Student Development Centre which supports potentially vulnerable students. This has not in the past led to good achievement for disadvantaged students. Leaders have recently reviewed how this funding is spent. Early indications are that this is now having a more positive effect on the progress of disadvantaged students.
- The curriculum is broad and well matched to students' interest and abilities. Students in Year 7 are helped to settle into the academy by having only one teacher for their 'Live2Learn' lessons, which cover a number of subjects. Opportunities to develop students' literacy skills in all subjects are not fully exploited. Plans are in place to modify the Key Stage 4 curriculum in 2015 into three pathways to suit the abilities of all students more closely. Independent careers advice is available for all year groups, so students are clear about their next steps in education, training or employment.
- Most aspects of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding are developed through assemblies, tutor time and enrichment activities. Many after-school clubs are available. Students' cultural development is weaker. Although leaders have plans to address this, there are currently too few opportunities for students to learn about people from different backgrounds and cultures. This means students are not fully prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Senior leaders have improved systems for monitoring students' progress and attainment. More ambitious targets are now set for all students.
- Middle leadership is improving. Subject leaders are playing a growing role in raising standards of teaching and student progress in their areas.
- Leaders make regular checks on the progress and achievement of students who learn away from the academy site. There is a good working partnership with these providers.
- The academy does not tolerate discrimination and is committed to making sure that students from all backgrounds and starting points get on well together and have an equal chance to succeed. The academy fosters good relations with all.
- The academy is popular with parents. The very large majority of parents feel the academy is well led and managed, and would recommend it to others.
- The academy's policies and procedures for keeping students safe meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Many governors are regular visitors to the academy and see the quality of teaching for themselves. They oversee performance management arrangements and know that teachers' salary progression is based on students' progress, and how any underperformance is tackled. They make use of external consultants to gain an independent view of the effectiveness of the academy.
 - Governors understand what the data on students' performance tells them about how well the academy is performing. As a result, governors have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement, and effectively challenge academy leaders to bring about improvements.
 - Governors make sure the academy's finances are well managed. They know how additional funds, such as the pupil premium, are spent, and with what impact on the achievement of disadvantaged students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Their effort, behaviour and work rate vary too much across the academy. Attitudes to learning are usually positive, but students told inspectors that although they can behave well, their conduct and effort in class are not always as good as they should be.
- Learning is rarely interrupted by the poor behaviour of others. When this does happen, it is usually as a

result of teaching which is not good enough to engage students' attention and interest.

- Students' conduct is generally good around the academy. Students are normally polite and respectful to staff, visitors and each other. Students say that behaviour around the site is improving. Most students move between lessons calmly and safely, although a few are sometimes less sensible.
- Students treat the academy buildings and facilities with respect. Little litter is dropped and there is no graffiti around the site. Recent, more rigorous checks on students' school uniform mean that almost all students are smartly dressed.
- Parents and staff have very few concerns about the behaviour of students.

Safety

- The school's work to keep its students safe and secure is good. Students told inspectors that they feel safe, and that teachers look after them well. The very large majority of parents say their children are happy and feel safe in the academy.
- The academy site is safe and secure. There are good procedures for checking visitors to the academy. All necessary checks are carried out before staff are appointed.
- Students are taught well how to stay safe. They understand, for example, the potential dangers of using the internet because they learn about this in lessons and assemblies.
- Students are taught about different types of bullying, and told inspectors about a recent assembly on homophobia. Students say that bullying is very rare, but if it does take place, cyber-bullying is the most likely. They say academy leaders deal with this well, and it quickly stops once they tell an adult.
- Exclusion rates are low. Racism is almost unknown. Students' attendance has risen, and is now average.
- The academy works well with providers of off-site work-related courses to check on the attendance and behaviour of students who attend this alternative provision.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Despite recent improvements, the quality of teaching remains too variable, and is not yet consistently good. As a result, students' standards of literacy, reading and mathematics require improvement.
- Work is not always matched closely to the different abilities of students. This is especially true for the academy's able students, who could do more difficult work and make more rapid progress.
- Questions are not always directed well enough to check the understanding of all students, or to make all students think hard. Students are not always encouraged to develop their speaking skills by explaining their answers fully.
- Standards of literacy are good in students' English work. In other subjects, however, expectations of spelling, punctuation, presentation and grammar are not always high enough, and there are insufficient opportunities for students to write at length.
- Teachers' marking is often of high quality. It is frequent and detailed, and gives students clear guidance on how to improve their work. Teachers do not always check that students' responses will help them to improve their work.
- Relationships between teachers and students are warm, positive and respectful. Teachers praise students for their effort and their contributions to lessons. Many teachers use humour well, which helps students to enjoy learning.
- Many teachers use interesting resources which engage students well. In a geography lesson on the one-child policy in China, for example, students in Year 9 were shown some dramatic photographs. They were very motivated by these images, and responded in a mature and thoughtful way.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the academy in Year 7 with standards in English and mathematics which are often well below average. Too many students do not make good progress. In 2014, the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C including mathematics and English was well below average.
- In 2014, the proportion of students who made or exceeded the progress expected of them in mathematics was well below average. The proportion who gained a grade C or better at GCSE in mathematics was similarly well below average. Recent improvements to the quality of teaching mean that students are now making more rapid progress in mathematics. Results are on course to improve in 2015.
- The progress of the most able students requires improvement because teachers do not always plan work for them which is difficult enough. The proportions of students gaining the highest A* and A grades at

GCSE are well below average in most subjects. An exception is in Religious Education, where the proportion achieving the highest grades is above that seen nationally.

- In 2014, students in Year 11 eligible for support through the pupil premium were one GCSE grade below others in the academy in English, and one and a half grades below in mathematics. Compared to non-disadvantaged students nationally, they were one grade below in English and almost two grades below in mathematics. Academy data and inspectors' checks both confirm that these disadvantaged students are now making faster progress than in the past. Gaps in attainment are narrowing, and are on course to close further by 2015.
- In the past, students were entered early for GCSE examinations in mathematics, history and geography. Too few students made good progress in these subjects. As a result, the academy no longer enters students early for examinations.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. The education provided is generally well matched to their needs. Their progress and attainment are better in English than in mathematics.
- Academy leaders make appropriate use of the extra 'catch-up' funding for students in Year 7 who join the academy with the lowest starting points. Targeted spending means these students begin to catch up in English and mathematics during their first year in the academy.
- Students who attend alternative provision attain results in work-related courses that are in line with their abilities. Most progress successfully into employment or into work-related training.
- Students in 2014 made much better progress in English than in 2013. The proportion making the progress expected of them was above average and the proportion gaining a grade C or better rose to close to national average levels. Students' literacy skills develop well in English lessons, but their standards of writing are less good in other subjects. The communication skills of many students are not well developed and they lack confidence in speaking in public.
- As a result of improved teaching, more precise checks made by leaders and carefully targeted help where it is needed, students' progress is now more rapid than in the past. The academy's own data and checks made by inspectors confirm that students' achievement is set to rise in 2015.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Students' prior attainment when they start the sixth form is below average. A small number of students follow solely academic courses, a number follow work-related courses, with the majority following a combination of academic and work-related courses.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved, and is now good. Progress measures for both academic and work-related courses are good. Current information shows that progress at AS and A-level is improving quickly because teaching is getting better. Disadvantaged students make good progress and achieve in line with other students.
- The courses offered to students are well matched to their interests and abilities. As a result, almost all students who start a course go on to complete it successfully.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is improving and, although some inconsistencies remain, it is now good. As a result, students make good progress in all subjects.
- The sixth form meets the national 16–19 interim minimum standards. Most students who enter the sixth form without at least a grade C in English improve their grade. All those who entered the sixth form with a grade D in mathematics improved their grade in 2014, but those with lower grades were less successful.
- Students are positive about the quality of careers information, advice and guidance they receive, which is provided by an external contractor.
- Students are kept safe. Their attendance has risen sharply in recent years, and now matches that of younger students in the main academy.
- The leadership of the sixth form is good. It is led with commitment and enthusiasm. As a result, standards are rising. Students' progress towards challenging targets is checked regularly. Leaders have an accurate view of the sixth form's strengths and weaknesses, and have plans to improve it further.
- Students speak highly of the range of non-qualification courses they can follow. Examples include 'Tomorrow's Teachers', website design, and music courses. A charity committee, led by sixth formers, works with all year groups to raise funds for good causes. Academy leaders recognise that students need more awareness of the world of business, and of people from different cultures and backgrounds. Plans are in place to address this.

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

Unique reference number	136141
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	453505

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 the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,237
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	154
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jette Burford
Principal	Alison Sherman
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2013
Telephone number	01744 678859
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