

# The Sutton Academy

Elton Head Road, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 5AU

## Inspection dates

8–9 May 2019

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- For the past three years, leaders have removed a significant number of pupils from the school's roll during Year 11. This was not in pupils' best interests. This constitutes off-rolling by Ofsted's definition.
- Although leaders have made significant improvements to the curriculum, they have not ensured that pupils access a broad and ambitious curriculum in all subjects in key stage 3.
- Pupils have continued to underachieve in external examinations since the previous inspection, particularly in English, science, history, geography and modern foreign languages.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not made the progress of which they are capable during their time at the school. Although this is improving, disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 continue to underachieve.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have made significant improvements to many areas of the school's work since the last inspection.
- Governors and trustees have overseen most aspects of the school's work well.
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is particularly strong and has led to widespread improvements to the effectiveness of teaching.
- Teachers cater effectively for pupils' diverse needs. They use assessment well to carefully identify what pupils can and cannot do.
- Teachers provide pupils with useful support to develop their literacy skills. This work complements the significant improvements that have been made to the teaching of English.
- Due to improved teaching, pupils are making considerably better progress across the curriculum.
- Pupils' behaviour has continued to improve. Pupils have developed a strong work ethic and are committed to doing well.
- Pupils benefit from varied and high-quality opportunities to enhance their personal development. This ensures that they are well prepared for the future.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding which is underpinned by positive relationships between pupils and staff.
- Strong leadership of the sixth form has led to sustained improvement in students' outcomes.

## Full report

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

- Improve leadership and management, including at trustee and governor levels, by ensuring that:
  - the practice of 'off-rolling' pupils stops immediately
  - further improvements are made to the key stage 3 curriculum to make sure that pupils access a broad and ambitious curriculum in all subjects.
- Improve pupils' outcomes further by ensuring that:
  - pupils make greater progress across the curriculum and particularly in science, history, geography and modern foreign languages
  - differences in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of others continue to diminish significantly.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- In January 2019, leaders removed 12 pupils from the school's roll. These pupils had been attending alternative provision. They were transferred to the alternative provider's roll. This means that these pupils will not be represented in any published information about The Sutton Academy, such as information about pupils' progress and destinations. The decision to remove pupils from the school's roll was taken in the best interests of the school rather than the pupils. This constitutes 'off-rolling' according to Ofsted's definition.
- This process is well established at the school and has taken place for many years. A larger number of Year 11 pupils were off-rolled during the previous school year. A large proportion of pupils who have been off-rolled were disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The process of off-rolling pupils has been agreed with the local authority and with other school leaders within the local authority. Leaders and a representative from the local authority could not provide inspectors with any convincing reason for this practice.
- The school currently has a number of pupils accessing alternative provision. Under the local authority's current system, these pupils will be off-rolled if they are still accessing alternative provision in Year 11. Leaders agree that there is no sound justification for off-rolling and have indicated that the practice will be stopped immediately.
- Leaders check on the safety, attendance and behaviour of pupils who attend alternative provision. These checks have been in place for a number of years.
- Leaders have made clear improvements to most aspects of the school's work since the last inspection. They have made significant improvements to teaching, which is helping current pupils to make much better progress than their predecessors. These improvements have been recognised by the community which the school serves. Parents and carers are positive about the school's work. Many are fulsome in their praise of the school's staff and the impact that they have had on their children's progress and personal development. As a result, the school is becoming more popular and there has been a significant increase in the number of families seeking places for their children at the school.
- Leaders' improvements have been underpinned by the high expectations that they have of staff and pupils. These high expectations are reflected in the commitment and care that staff show in their work and the way that pupils conduct themselves and approach their studies.
- Leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is highly effective. Leaders have established a vibrant environment for improving teaching. Teachers greatly value the training that they undertake, which is carefully matched to the needs of individuals and groups of staff. Leaders have also ensured that the activities they undertake to monitor the effectiveness of teaching help staff to further develop teaching across the school. Teachers are effusive about the support that they receive and the direction that the school is going in. They feel a sense of collective pride in the improvements that have been made and are keen to develop the school further.

- Leaders show consideration for the well-being of staff. They consult staff on how their actions affect staff's workload. In turn, leaders modify practices and procedures in response to this feedback. For example, they have streamlined the requirements for assessing pupils' work and they have reduced the frequency with which staff are expected to provide information about how well pupils are learning.
- Subject leaders have been instrumental in improving teaching and learning across the curriculum. They benefit hugely from the additional support and responsibility that they have been given by senior leaders.
- Leaders have a clear rationale for the development of the curriculum. At the heart of the curriculum is an academic core. This reflects the high aspirations that leaders have for pupils. The school is moving towards the government's ambition for most pupils to be entered for the English Baccalaureate. The curriculum also reflects the importance that leaders attach to the arts. Leaders have modified the curriculum to ensure that it better meets pupils' diverse needs. For example, a small proportion of pupils in each year group follow a nurture curriculum, which prioritises pupils' personal development alongside their academic learning.
- Leaders have continued to develop the key stage 3 curriculum to ensure that it builds on pupils' learning in primary school and provides a firm foundation for success in key stage 4. Despite this, leaders have not ensured that pupils study a curriculum in each subject that is the equal of the national curriculum in terms of breadth and ambition. For example, the history curriculum is regularly reviewed and modified. However, it does not provide pupils who do not opt to study history beyond Year 8 with a rich, broad and balanced understanding of the past.
- Pupils benefit from opportunities to take part in a rich and varied range of extra-curricular activities. Options include photography, choir and cheerleading. Leaders carefully monitor participation in these activities. Their records indicate that a large proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, regularly participate.
- The leaders responsible for overseeing the support offered to pupils with SEND have made significant improvements. They ensure that pupils and their families are at the heart of planning and reviewing the support provided. Leaders ensure that teachers receive the information, training and ongoing support that they require to meet the needs of these pupils. They also ensure that pupils receive appropriate additional support to overcome personal barriers to achievement that may relate to specific aspects of learning or social development. Due to these improvements, pupils with SEND are making far greater gains in their learning than has been the case in the past.
- Leaders are discerning in their use of pupil premium funding. Their strategy for improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is focused on alleviating the barriers that they often face; for example, leaders' strategy aims to build pupils' aspirations. It is also focused on improving pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics and ensuring that these pupils access cultural opportunities that they may not have experienced before. They evaluate the impact of their actions effectively, which ensures that future planning is based on a clear understanding of what has and has not worked well in the past. The impact of the school's work in this area can clearly be seen in the improved progress that disadvantaged pupils now make throughout the school.

## Governance of the school

- Governors have not provided strong moral oversight of all aspects of the school's work. In particular, they have failed to hold leaders to account for the off-rolling of pupils that has taken place for many years. In this respect, they have failed in their duty to ensure that leaders always act in pupils' best interests.
- Trustees have not held governors to account for allowing the process of off-rolling to take place. This, in part, is because there has been a lack of strategic distance between trustees and governors. The trust board is aware of this and is in the process of changing the way that the trust operates. This is to ensure that there is a clearer separation between the responsibilities of the trust board and those of the governing body.
- Governors closely oversee the school's work in other areas. They challenge leaders over key priorities to ensure that improvements continue to be made. For example, they stringently hold leaders to account for the progress of disadvantaged pupils, which helps leaders to develop and refine their use of pupil premium funding.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have developed a culture of safeguarding, which is underpinned by the strong relationships that exist between pupils and staff. Pupils feel well looked after. They typically say that they trust staff and that they would feel comfortable disclosing any worries or concerns.
- Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding and have a good understanding of the risks that are potentially more prevalent among pupils at the school. They are alert to signs of abuse or neglect and pass on concerns, as appropriate, using the school's systems.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum equips pupils with a thorough understanding of how to keep themselves safe in different situations. Pupils' learning about e-safety is particularly detailed. Leaders work productively with a range of external agencies, such as health professionals, to support pupils who are particularly vulnerable.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Leaders have ensured that teaching, learning and assessment have improved significantly since the last inspection. Teaching is now good, which is enabling pupils to make better progress across the curriculum.
- The improvements to teaching have been underpinned by two factors. Firstly, the strength of relationships between teachers and pupils. Secondly, the increased expectations that teachers have of pupils. These factors have led to the establishment of purposeful, ambitious and collaborative approaches within classrooms.
- Teachers are typically clear and precise when they explain new knowledge and concepts. They question pupils well to ascertain their understanding and deepen their thinking.

- Teaching has improved in both English and mathematics. In English, teachers provide effective support to pupils, which enables them to develop the technical accuracy and fluency of their writing. Pupils enjoy the texts that they study and have a good knowledge of plot and characterisation. However, their contextual understanding of literature is less developed.
- Teachers of mathematics use their secure subject knowledge to carefully support the learning of individuals and groups. Their explanations of new concepts are clear and they model new skills and processes effectively. Pupils are supported well to develop their mathematical problem-solving and reasoning skills, although this is done most effectively for the most able pupils.
- Leaders have maintained established strengths in the teaching of vocational subjects, art, technology, social sciences, physical education, business studies, the arts and information technology. In these subjects, pupils demonstrate a thirst for knowledge and are keen to do their very best. They produce work which is of a particularly high standard.
- Teaching has improved in subjects with historically weak outcomes, such as science, the humanities and modern foreign languages. In these subjects, teachers are catering more effectively for the needs of different groups of pupils. They systematically develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. Despite this, there remains some significant variability in the effectiveness of teaching in these areas. For example, the teaching of German is not leading to the same improvements in pupils' outcomes as are seen in both French and Spanish.
- Teachers are meticulous in their approach to meeting the needs of individual pupils. They pay great attention to the potential barriers to learning faced by different pupils and employ creative strategies to overcome these. For example, some teachers are systematic and imaginative in their approach to helping pupils who lack confidence in particular subjects. This approach is leading to all groups of pupils, including the most able, making better progress than they have in the past.
- Teachers cater effectively for pupils with SEND. They make good use of the guidance and support provided by leaders to meet the individual needs of these pupils. However, there remains significant variability in the extent to which teachers make effective use of teaching assistants to support pupils' learning. This hampers the learning of some pupils.
- Teachers adopt a consistent approach to supporting the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. They focus on developing pupils' vocabulary and helping them to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils are also supported to develop cross-curricular aspects of numeracy, such as those that relate to the production of graphs and charts.
- Pupils clearly understand what they can and cannot do because of effective assessment. Teachers use the information that they gather on pupils' learning to ensure that future teaching addresses gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.
- The school's approach to homework reflects the higher expectations that staff now have of pupils. Pupils are expected to complete regular homework, which consolidates and develops their understanding and hones their independent learning skills. Teachers

carefully monitor how well pupils are doing with their homework to ensure that they develop positive learning habits.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils' personal development is given high priority. Pupils leave the school as well-rounded individuals who are well prepared for their futures.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying, such as that which takes place online. They report that bullying is rare. Most feel that staff are good at dealing with the rare instances of bullying that occur.
- Pupils benefit from a broad range of opportunities to develop their leadership qualities. For example, pupils can become anti-bullying or healthy-eating ambassadors. They can also apply to join the student council or become prefects.
- Improved careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) has increased the proportion of pupils who move on to further education, employment or training when they leave the school. Leaders have a clear understanding of how to improve this aspect of their work further. They are developing opportunities to involve parents more in the careers education that their children receive.
- Pupils have a good understanding of British values. Their understanding of democracy is enhanced through their participation in the democratic process connected with the student council. Their good behaviour reflects their understanding of the importance of the rule of law.
- Pupils feel that the school supports them to maintain their physical and emotional health.
- The school helps pupils to develop their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. The religious education curriculum provides pupils with a knowledge of different religions and cultures, as well as an insight into some philosophical and ethical issues. Pupils' charity work also develops their understanding of others, including those who are less fortunate.
- Pupils have a good understanding of issues relating to equality. They report that the use of sexist, racist, homophobic or other derogatory language is exceptionally rare.
- Leaders carefully oversee the education that pupils in alternative provision receive. They are diligent in ensuring that these pupils are safe and attend regularly. They liaise closely with providers to monitor pupils' behaviour and personal development. They also check on pupils' academic progress.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave very well during lessons. They are keen to do well and focus intently on their work. This reflects the success of strategies employed by leaders to improve pupils' attitudes to learning.

- Pupils also behave well around the school site. They are polite and considerate of others. The school environment is calm, friendly and harmonious.
- Pupils are regularly rewarded for good conduct, attendance and effort. Pupils appreciate the rewards that they receive and say that these provide a further incentive for them to do their best.
- The school has improved the support that it offers pupils who have exhibited challenging behaviour in the past. Importantly, improvements to teaching and the curriculum have led to the needs of these pupils being met more effectively than previously. This work has resulted in a reduction in the proportion of pupils who access alternative provision due to ongoing concerns about their conduct. It has also led to a further reduction in rates of fixed-term exclusions.
- Pupils' attendance has been in line with historical national averages for the past few years. This is due to the effective strategies employed by leaders to promote and reward regular attendance and challenge unnecessary absence. Despite this, rates of absence among disadvantaged pupils have been consistently higher than those for other pupils in the school and nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has also been in line with the national average since the previous inspection. This proportion has reduced during the current school year.
- Pupils are typically punctual to school. Incidents of lateness have fallen further this year. Pupils are attentive to instructions from staff. They move quickly to their lessons after breaktimes and lunchtimes.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, pupils have made better progress in their learning than has been the case in the past. Despite this, the performance of successive Year 11 cohorts in external examinations indicates that they have made weak progress across the curriculum during their time at the school. Pupils' progress has been particularly weak in English, science, the humanities and modern foreign languages. Disadvantaged pupils and boys have continued to make poor progress, particularly in English.
- Pupils have achieved very well in external examinations in some subjects, such as business studies, health and social care, construction, religious studies and art. This is because of the high-quality teaching that pupils have received in these subjects.
- Leaders' information about the progress of pupils currently in Year 11 indicates that they are making more progress than their counterparts from previous years. However, their information indicates that disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 are still underachieving significantly.
- Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making impressive progress in all other year groups and across the curriculum. This reflects the consistent improvements that have been made to teaching. It is also a direct result of these pupils having studied a broader and more balanced key stage 3 curriculum.
- Pupils with SEND are making much better progress throughout the school than previously. The performance of these pupils in recent external examinations indicates



that their progress is improving towards that of other pupils nationally. These improvements are due to careful leadership and teaching that is attentive to each pupil's individual needs.

- The most able pupils are making greater gains in their learning. This is because teachers challenge these pupils more systematically. These pupils are beginning to flourish and live up to the higher expectations that leaders and teachers have of their learning.
- Pupils have made much better progress in mathematics over the past two years. This is a direct result of more effective teaching. Pupils, including boys and the disadvantaged, are now making considerably stronger progress in English due to the improved teaching of this subject, which has been augmented by the consistent application of the school's literacy policy by teachers across the curriculum.
- Leaders promote the virtues of reading regularly. For example, pupils read a range of different texts during form periods. Pupils who join Year 7 with low prior attainment in English are supported capably. These pupils benefit from a range of interventions that enable them to make accelerated progress with their spelling and reading. They are also helped to develop specific reading skills, such as deduction and inference.
- Pupils' improving progress, allied to clear strengths in their personal development, ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. Over the past two years, almost all pupils who have stayed at the school to the end of Year 11 have moved on to an appropriate destination.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- Leadership of the sixth form is highly effective. Leaders have a clear understanding of the sixth form's strengths and weaknesses. Their actions have led to sustained improvements to students' progress on academic courses. Students' performance in external examinations has shown that their progress is now broadly in line with national averages. Students have made significantly better progress in psychology, sociology, English language and chemistry than in the past.
- Students have continued to achieve very well on vocational courses. In particular, students make excellent progress in applied business and health and social care. In many cases, students' achievement is enhanced by studying a mixture of academic and vocational courses.
- Leaders have modified the curriculum since the last inspection. They have ensured that the range of qualifications on offer provides students with clear pathways to a suitably broad range of future destinations. Leaders have also improved the advice and guidance that is offered to students on entry to the sixth form. This ensures that students study courses that are well suited to their interests, aptitudes and ambitions.
- These developments have greatly improved rates of retention. A much higher proportion of students now complete their courses. In turn, this has enabled a higher proportion of students to move on to suitable destinations.
- Improvements to teaching have mirrored those that have been made in the main school. Teachers plan learning which is well matched to students' individual starting points. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to support and challenge each

student. They use assessment to ensure that students' individual needs are supported well.

- Students who have not attained a standard pass in English and/or mathematics at GCSE are well supported to improve their attainment in these subjects. Last year, most students who needed to resit GCSE English attained at least a standard pass. Many students were also successful at improving their grade in mathematics, although the proportion was not as high as in English.
- Rates of attendance are high and continue to improve.
- Students benefit from a broad range of opportunities to enhance their personal development. For example, students lead on different projects to raise money for charities. They also act as 'reading buddies' to pupils in key stage 3 and undertake work with feeder primary schools.
- CEIAG is well organised and is bespoke to students' individual needs and interests. Students learn about many opportunities that are available to them in the future, including various apprenticeship pathways. All students complete appropriate work experience placements which help them to further develop their employability skills.
- Safeguarding is effective. Students are supported to learn about risks that become more prevalent in early adulthood.
- All requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme are met.

## School details

Unique reference number	136141
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10087860

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,201
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	103
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Acting chair	Martin Carr
Principal	Alison Sherman
Telephone number	01744 678859
Website	<a href="http://www.thesuttonacademy.org.uk">www.thesuttonacademy.org.uk</a>
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Date of previous inspection	7–8 February 2017

## Information about this school

- The school is sponsored by St Helens College. The trust is in the process of rewriting its scheme of delegation.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The large majority of pupils are White British. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A number of pupils are educated in alternative provision. Pupils attend Launchpad,

which is St Helen's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Leaders from the PRU arrange for pupils to attend further alternative provision at MPH Training, Aspire Training Services, Achievement Through Mentoring and Encouragement Through Sport. Under current arrangements, pupils are dual-registered with both Sutton Academy and the PRU. During Year 11, pupils are taken off the roll of Sutton Academy and placed solely on the roll of the PRU.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects. Many observations were conducted jointly with school leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' work during lessons. They also carried out a work scrutiny with a senior leader.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils. They also talked with others informally. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders. Inspectors also met with a group of teachers, a group of non-teaching staff and a group of staff who work in the sixth form.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the acting chair who is also the acting chair of the trust board. He spoke with a representative of the local authority who is also on the governing body. He spoke with the recently retired chair of governors, who was also the chair of the trust board. An inspector spoke with a member of staff from the PRU.
- Inspectors took account of the 84 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey and the 46 free-text responses from parents.
- Inspectors considered the 67 responses to the online staff questionnaire and the 111 responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information about the school's performance and documents relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Osama Abdul Rahim	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Caldecott	Ofsted Inspector
Timothy Gartside	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Platt	Ofsted Inspector

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