

Inspection of St Helena School

Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3LE

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 January 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Good

The head of school is Charlie McCarthy. This school is part of The Sigma Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lyn Wright, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sue Hammond. There is also an executive headteacher, Fiona Pierson, who is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Helena School is a place where everyone wants the very best for pupils. The school's values of aspire, believe and achieve sit behind the decisions the school makes for everyone to succeed. Pupils value the warm and positive relationships they develop with their teachers. This helps them feel safe. Pupils know there is always someone they can speak to if they have concerns.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and the attitudes they show towards their learning. This creates a calm and purposeful atmosphere across the school. Pupils recognise that behaviour has improved a great deal over recent years. Pupils say that bullying can happen. However, the school takes this seriously and acts quickly to resolve any issues.

This is a school where everyone is welcome. Pupils treat visitors with warmth and curiosity. Pupils of all backgrounds are accepted into the school community. Pupils here are kind and respectful.

The school has a very wide offer of different activities and opportunities for pupils to develop their interests. This includes a range of clubs such as chess club, art club and a comprehensive sporting programme. The school's popular robotics club has competed successfully at national and international events.

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

The school has designed a well-constructed, ambitious and varied curriculum. Recent changes have ensured that more pupils study subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate.

Reading sits at the heart of the curriculum. Pupils are expected to read regularly across subjects. The school has a robust approach to identifying and supporting pupils who struggle to read. This helps them to learn to read well.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They use this knowledge to teach the curriculum effectively. The school has ensured that teachers are well trained. Teachers usually select the most appropriate teaching strategies and activities. Pupils develop rich and detailed knowledge through these choices. However, occasionally, teachers do not always check that pupils have the knowledge they need to understand new subject content or to practise skills effectively. This means that pupils sometimes do not learn the curriculum as well as they could.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get the help they need to learn the curriculum alongside their peers. The school has developed effective processes for identifying and supporting pupils with SEND. Teachers receive the information they need to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. This helps pupils with SEND to achieve well.

The school's personal development programme is well planned. Pupils learn about being healthy, active and informed citizens through daily 'opening minds' lessons. This is complemented by a focus in all subjects on moral and cultural knowledge. Careers education is comprehensive. Pupils receive comprehensive careers information through the curriculum and a range of events and other activities. This gives them the information they need to consider their next steps.

The school has clear expectations for pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Staff implement the school's approaches to behaviour consistently. As a result, pupils' behaviour is positive and focused on learning. The school is acting sooner to respond to poor behaviour and to help pupils make the right choices. This is further improving behaviour.

The school works closely with pupils and their families to identify and overcome barriers to attending school. It has developed clear and robust processes to support this work. As a result, attendance has improved over recent years. Pupils attend regularly, and far fewer are persistently absent.

Leaders have expertly identified and improved areas of the school that have been weaker in the past. This has led to significant improvements in the quality of education provided and in pupils' behaviour and attendance. Staff are very positive about the support and help they receive from leaders. The school ensures that all staff receive high-quality training and development opportunities. The trust and those involved in governance provide highly effective challenge and support to the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, teachers do not always check that pupils have the knowledge needed to understand new learning or to complete activities. This means that pupils can miss out on learning important knowledge or unsuccessfully practise the skills that teachers had intended. The school should ensure that all teachers check that pupils have the prior knowledge needed for new learning or to complete activities.

How can I feed back my views?

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

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

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137944
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10287116
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,009
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sue Hammond
CEO of the trust	Lyn Wright
Headteacher	Charlie McCarthy (Head of school), Fiona Pierson (Executive headteacher)
Website	www.st-helena.essex.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 December 2017

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Sigma Trust.
- The school currently uses four alternative providers for pupils. Three of these are registered.
- The school operates its own provision offering an alternative curriculum for a small number of pupils from this school and another school in the trust.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust, the chair of the trust and the chair of the local governing committee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, history, science, music and languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector also met with subject leaders and reviewed curriculum and assessment documentation in computing and physical education.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Marc White, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Steven Hogan	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Sutton	Ofsted Inspector
David Piercy	Ofsted Inspector

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