

# Inspection of a good school: Sutton School

Scotts Green Close, Russells Hall Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 2DU

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Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

## **Outcome**

Sutton School continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils achieve well at Sutton School. Pupils are happy and excited to talk about their experiences here. Ambitious leaders focus on preparing pupils to be future citizens within the town of Dudley. Pupils embody the school motto 'safe, happy, learning – towards independence'.

The school is highly ambitious for what pupils can achieve. Pupils have many opportunities to share their goals and ambitions with staff. All staff know pupils and their families very well. As a result, staff carefully plan alongside pupils and their parents and carers how to achieve pupils' ambitions for their future. These achievements include a range of academic and vocational qualifications and other accreditations. In addition, staff teach pupils skills to help them with their independence.

Relationships between staff and pupils are highly respectful. Pupils and staff speak to each other with warmth and kindness. The school takes time to gather important information about each pupil before they join the school. Pupils' transition into school is strong. This means that staff understand pupils' needs early on. This helps pupils feel welcome and well understood. Consequently, pupils are settled and content from the very start.

Pupils have a range of wider opportunities. This includes the well-known 'Sutton Productions' where pupils lead theatrical shows at the local civic hall.

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

There have been many positive changes to the school in recent years. The current leadership team has driven improvements since the last inspection. It, for example, quickly identified that changes were required to further improve the curriculum. The number of pupils joining the school with complex needs has increased. In response,

leaders continue to adapt and refine subject areas. Consequently, the curriculum now effectively supports all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The school has high expectations for all pupils. This is reflected in the ambitious curriculum leaders have created. Leaders have organised the curriculum so that pupils with similar needs learn together. This approach is working well. In many subjects, pupils are learning the curriculum in a clear and logical order. For example, in physical education (PE), pupils are taught the specific skills needed to participate in a cricket game. Pupils are taught how to roll and then throw a ball using underarm and overarm techniques. Pupils then move on to bowl and bat a ball with accuracy. Pupils' physical and mobility needs are also carefully considered within PE lessons. In addition, resources are purposefully selected to help pupils learn PE successfully. However, in some subjects, the precise small steps of knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn are not clearly defined. In these subjects, teachers decide on this knowledge for their individual classes. When this happens, pupils' knowledge and skills do not always build in a logical way. This slows pupils' learning in these areas.

Early reading and communication have rightly been prioritised by the school. Staff expertly deliver phonics lessons and address any misconceptions quickly. Pupils at the pre-phonics stage are taught how to identify sounds using symbols and signing.

Across school, communication aids have been created to support pupils to access different subject areas. This includes a sharp focus on improving all pupils' subject-specific vocabulary. However, the agreed systems to help pupils communicate their thoughts and ideas are not always consistently implemented in some lessons and at different parts of the school day. This means that some pupils with complex needs are not always well understood without the support of an adult who knows them well.

Behaviour across school is calm and purposeful. Staff understand how pupils' behaviours and emotions can be a barrier to their learning. Accurate support is quickly and effectively put in place by well-trained staff. As a result, pupils are content and settled.

The curriculum to support pupils' wider development is impressive. Pupils access a wealth of experiences, including educational visits and extra-curricular clubs. Pupils take part in sports tournaments and volunteering opportunities and raise money for charity. Pupils are given various opportunities for accessing careers advice, work experience and vocational learning. Older pupils are given a notable and helpful range of study options as part of the 'pathways' curriculum.

The school is held in high regard by parents and the local authority. They comment positively on the changes to the school in recent years. Governors fulfil their statutory duties.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school has not identified with precision the essential component knowledge and skills it wants pupils to learn. This means that pupils are not accurately building on what they have previously learned in a clear and logical way. This slows pupils' learning. The school should identify the component knowledge and skills in all parts of the curriculum and ensure that they are built over time clearly and accurately.
- In some lessons and across different parts of the school day, the agreed systems to support pupils' speech, communication and language needs are not consistently implemented by staff. As a result, some pupils with complex needs are unable to effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas without the support of a familiar adult. The school should ensure that throughout the school day, all staff consistently implement the agreed communication systems so that all pupils can express themselves and be well understood at all times.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2013.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	103877
<b>Local authority</b>	Dudley
<b>Inspection number</b>	10294501
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Foundation special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	192
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Emma Hindle
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ian Curnow
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.sutton.dudley.sch.uk/">www.sutton.dudley.sch.uk/</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- There have been several changes to leadership since the last inspection. The headteacher and deputy headteacher were promoted from within the school in September 2022. A new chair of governors was also appointed in September 2022. An interim assistant headteacher has been in post since January 2024.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The primary area of need includes cognition and learning, and speech, language and communication needs. Pupils also have associated needs, such as physical, sensory and medical needs.
- The school currently uses three registered alternative provisions.
- 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 apprenticeship.

## Information about this inspection

- 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 inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the chair of governors, additional representatives from the governing board, subject coordinators, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with passenger assistants, drivers and staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with a school improvement consultant and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including early reading, communication, personal, social, health and economic education and PE. 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 inspectors also looked at additional subjects, including history and geography.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. Inspectors also looked at responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation, school policies and curriculum documents.

### **Inspection team**

Anna Vrahimi, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kirsty Foulkes

His Majesty's Inspector

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