# Inspection of The St Leonards Academy

Edinburgh Campus, Edinburgh Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN38 8HH

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| Inspection dates: | 28 and 29 January 2025 |
| The quality of education | **Inadequate** |
| Behaviour and attitudes | **Inadequate** |
| Personal development | **Inadequate** |
| Leadership and management | **Inadequate** |
| Previous inspection grade | Requires improvement |

The principal of this school is Jon Francies. This school is part of the University of Brighton Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, John Smith, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Siobhan Denning.

## What is it like to attend this school?

The school's actions to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour are not effective enough. Too many pupils miss vital time in school due to absence, so their learning is severely disrupted. A considerable minority of pupils do not respect each other or the school's expectations for behaviour. The rate of suspensions remains too high and continues to increase. In lessons, many pupils' attitudes to learning are generally positive. However, a substantial number fail to engage with their learning, and this is often not challenged by staff.

Most pupils feel safe in school. However, some pupils, and parents and carers, raised concerns with inspectors about how effectively the school deals with bullying. Derogatory language is too common and makes some pupils feel uncomfortable about their sexuality or religious beliefs. The school has a robust policy for dealing with bullying when it is reported, and staff provide appropriate support and sanctions when bullying is confirmed.

The school's ambitions for pupils' achievement remain too low. Teaching does not routinely enable pupils to remember knowledge securely over time. In class, the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not well met. Many pupils leave school without the qualifications they require for their next steps in education, employment or training.

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

The school has experienced much turbulence and uncertainty. This unsettling situation affects pupils, parents, and staff. Improvements to the curriculum and teaching are too slow. In a few subjects, pupils' achievement is improving, but, in many, teaching is too inconsistent and does not focus on pupils' learning strongly enough. The school has made a start to placing the English Baccalaureate subjects at the heart of the curriculum but has further work to do to address the underlying causes which are impeding this ambition.

The school has identified critical knowledge that pupils need to learn and remember. Sometimes, teachers provide opportunities for pupils to recall what they have learned. However, in most subjects, teachers do not check that pupils understand and remember important information before they move on. This means that pupils develop misconceptions, and gaps in their learning.

The school does not prioritise reading strongly enough. The school does not support pupils who need help with comprehension and fluency, except in Year 7. Few pupils read for pleasure. Teachers do not teach and explain key vocabulary to pupils effectively enough.

In mainstream classes, teaching does not meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Pupils do not receive tailored support to help them understand or remember previous learning. Pupils in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND benefit from care and support to regulate their emotions.

A significant minority of pupils misbehave and are suspended for poor behaviour. The school does not have an effective strategy for helping pupils catch up when they have missed vital work. This means pupils have large gaps in knowledge, skills or understanding. In lessons, many pupils have positive attitudes to learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11. However, some lack motivation, and this hinders their learning. Overall, most pupils' behaviour is generally acceptable. However, as pupils join or leave lessons, they sometimes do so in an unruly fashion. This makes some pupils feel unsafe.

Too few pupils attend school regularly. The school has not done enough to prioritise the improvement of attendance for pupils with high absence rates. Systems to monitor attendance are new and emerging. Too many pupils miss vital learning and are at risk of falling further behind.

The provision for pupils' personal development is inconsistent, and too few benefit from the opportunities offered. The curriculum for personal, social, and health education (PSHE) is designed to cover relevant and crucial information pupils need to know. However, the school does not ensure that pupils understand and remember this information. Although the school offers extra-curricular clubs, too few pupils are motivated to attend, and the school has not done enough to encourage disadvantaged pupils to make the most of these opportunities. Pupils receive independent careers advice and guidance. This helps them consider the next steps in their education.

The school has not acted swiftly enough to stem the decline in standards identified at the previous inspection. Areas of weakness are not identified accurately enough. The trust and local governors do not provide rigorous challenge to the school in order to secure the necessary improvements.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

## (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The trust and the school have not done enough to tackle the many weaknesses in the school. The school does not have an accurate understanding of its own deficiencies. Oversight and challenge from the trust is not robust enough. This means that pupils do not receive the quality of education they deserve. The trust should ensure that the school is supported to make the necessary changes, rapidly, for the benefit of pupils and the community it serves.
- The school has not eradicated weaknesses in the curriculum and teaching swiftly enough. This means that pupils' achievement remains poor. The school should focus its

actions on those aspects of the curriculum and teaching that are most in need of improvement and rapidly rectify the shortcomings identified by this inspection.

- Teachers' checks on pupils' learning do not enable them to know how well pupils learn the curriculum. Often gaps in knowledge or misconceptions go unaddressed. Pupils do not understand or remember key vocabulary. The school should ensure that teachers accurately identify misconceptions and gaps in pupils' knowledge and vocabulary and then tackle these deficiencies in their subsequent teaching.
- Teachers do not adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with SEND effectively enough. This means that pupils with SEND are not supported to build knowledge and skills consistently well and do not attain the qualifications that they need to progress to their next stages of education, training or employment. The school should ensure that teachers know how to meet the needs of pupils with SEND effectively so that they consistently achieve high standards.
- Many pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, are often absent from school. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains worryingly high. The rate of suspensions is high and not reducing. Too many pupils, therefore, miss vital learning and are at risk of falling even further behind. The school should ensure that it takes robust action so that attendance improves rapidly, persistent absence decreases, and the rate of suspensions reduces.
- The school does not ensure that pupils remember critical knowledge and skills taught in PSHE. Furthermore, the school does not ensure that enough pupils benefit from a wide, rich set of experiences beyond the curriculum. This means that many do not develop skills or talents or take advantage of activities designed to develop cultural capital. The school should ensure that pupils understand and remember vital information taught in PSHE. The school should redouble its efforts to ensure that pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, engage with the extra-curricular opportunities on offer.

## 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

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| **Unique reference number** | 136400 |
| **Local authority** | East Sussex |
| **Inspection number** | 10341670 |
| **Type of school** | Secondary comprehensive |
| **School category** | Academy sponsor-led |
| **Age range of pupils** | 11 to 16 |
| **Gender of pupils** | Mixed |
| **Number of pupils on the school roll** | 1,345 |
| **Appropriate authority** | Board of trustees |
| **Chair of trust** | Siobhan Denning |
| **CEO of the trust** | John Smith |
| **Principal** | Jon Francies |
| **Website** | www.thestleonardsacademy.org.uk |
| **Date of previous inspection** | 14 and 15 June 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act |

## Information about this school

- The school is a member of the University of Brighton Academies Trust.
- The school has specially resourced provision for 18 pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and/or physical disability.
- The school uses three registered and two unregistered providers of alternative provision.
- 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. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and

management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met the director of school improvement from the trust, a trustee and the chair of the local governing body.
- Inspectors met the principal, vice principal, head of academy, and other senior leaders including the special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, art, physical education and history. 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.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons in other subjects, spoke with teachers and pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils and observed their behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime.
- A wide range of the school's documentation was taken into consideration, including minutes of the local governing body and trust committees, policies and the school's own improvement plan.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 met with groups of staff and considered the opinions expressed through the online staff survey. Inspectors also took account of the views of parents and carers expressed through the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

## Inspection team

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| Linda Culling, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Christian Hicks | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Louise Agley | Ofsted Inspector |
| Elaine Parkinson | Ofsted Inspector |
| Charles Joseph | Ofsted Inspector |

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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