

The Sutton Academy

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

Unique reference number (URN): 136141

Inspection report: 16 June 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ● ●
Expected standard	● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders keep abreast of the latest educational research. They use this information very thoughtfully to inform the school's approaches to teaching and how they organise the curriculum. Leaders make astute decisions about what will best meet pupils' needs, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders support staff well through high-quality professional learning. Teachers use their professional learning to make changes that meet each pupil's needs. These adaptations are consistently embedded throughout the full range of the curriculum. These factors all contribute to lessons that are of a consistently high standard in all subjects, enabling pupils to build deep and thorough knowledge throughout the curriculum. This gives pupils a solid base on which to build further knowledge in the future.

Literacy and communication are prioritised in all lessons. Pupils are taught how to speak formally and challenged to use ambitious vocabulary. Their confidence blooms. Leaders are resolutely focused on pupils' development as independent learners. Through the school's 'revision revolution', pupils are encouraged to remember and connect knowledge. Leaders make certain that pupils at the early stages of reading, writing and using numbers get the precise help that they need quickly.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders demonstrate the very highest standards of care and aspiration for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those facing other disadvantages. They have astutely considered how to identify pupils' needs quickly and effectively. Moreover, leaders ensure that as pupils build their knowledge and skills or experience changing circumstances in their lives, these needs are reconsidered so that they continue to be supported in helpful ways.

Leaders' approach to teaching pupils with SEND is grounded in the principle of equal access. They do not lower the bar for what pupils can aspire to achieve. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND benefit from high-quality support that enables them to learn the same rich and ambitious curriculum as their peers. They provide detailed information and training to staff, which helps to ensure these pupils succeed.

Many aspects of the school's provision are planned with pupils' additional needs front and centre. For instance, leaders have used additional funding effectively to provide school uniforms that are adapted to avoid sensory distractions. Leaders anticipate that some pupils might struggle with emotions during a busy school day, so they provide time and space for pupils to share any anxieties.

Leaders use alternative provision thoughtfully. They check rigorously that pupils who attend alternative provision are getting an education that complements their learning in school.

Personal development and wellbeing are central to this school's ethos. Leaders carefully consider any community or national issues in their curriculum design. Pupils and students in the sixth form can speak confidently and in depth about matters of current importance, such as community cohesion. Pupils have a detailed knowledge of the fundamental British values, such as the rule of law. They can explain how these values are relevant to their own lives. Pupils learn how to stay safe online and offline, learning about online fraud and about topics, such as healthy relationships. As such, pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Leaders adopt a 'get active, get creative, get inspired' approach to personal development and wellbeing. They thoughtfully tailor the curriculum to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with other barriers to learning. Leaders ensure all pupils and students have chances to further develop themselves through a range of wider opportunities. This includes robotics club, which develops pupils' computer programming knowledge, community charity events that build pupils' organisational skills and a range of visits stretching as far as Japan. Because of this, pupils are gaining experiences they may not otherwise get a chance to.

Pastoral support is highly effective. Leaders carefully consider what is in the best interests of the pupils in their care. One pupil echoed the views of many, saying 'It is the kindness of the teachers that makes us who we are.'

The careers education programme is extensive. Pupils benefit from visiting speakers from a wide range of local businesses and colleges. All pupils have mock interviews with external employers and they receive feedback. This develops their confidence. Pupils also have opportunities for meaningful work-related experiences. Consequently, they are very well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Most pupils at The Sutton Academy attain in line with national averages in public examinations. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the minority of subjects where this is not the case, leaders review the curriculum to make sure that pupils secure a consistently deep and detailed knowledge. That said, the school's recent published examination results included a group of pupils who joined the school later on in their education. These pupils had not benefited as much as others from the school's high-quality curriculum and teaching. Pupils currently in the school are making solid progress through the curriculum and building the depth of knowledge that leaders intend. They can apply what they learn and develop into resilient learners over time.

Leaders' help for pupils who struggle to read, write or use numbers confidently is having a positive effect. Pupils catch up quickly. They grow in confidence and develop firm

foundations for their next step in life, be that further education, employment or training.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders use information about attendance to identify emerging patterns. They ensure that pupils get the help that they need to attend regularly. While the most recent published figures show that pupils do not attend school as often as the national average, there have been recent improvements. Additionally, the school welcomes pupils who have struggled with their attendance elsewhere. These pupils settle well and their attendance improves quickly. Persistent absence is reducing for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils at The Sutton Academy are universally polite and cooperative. They behave with kindness and respect and speak highly of the positive encouragement that they receive from staff. In lessons, pupils are focused and at social times they rarely need reminders about behaviour expectations. Pupils understand that bullying is not tolerated. On the rare occasions that bullying does occur, staff take effective action to deal with it. As a result of this, pupils feel safe. When pupils struggle to manage their emotions and behaviour, leaders put in place the support that they need.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders use research to find the most successful improvement strategies nationally. This enables them to carefully select what is best for their school. Owing to this, many of their strategies are having a positive impact.

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and priorities. Trustees understand their statutory responsibilities, including for safeguarding. They are ably supported by the trust to ensure they fulfil their duties.

The decisions leaders take are in the best interest of the pupils and sixth-form students in their care. Leaders have a positive influence on their school and its wider community. This includes pupils' families. Parents and carers trust leaders to ensure their children are safe, happy and that they are learning well.

Staff are highly supportive of school leaders. They are consulted about change and are part of any improvement processes. Leaders ensure staff receive the training they need. This helps them to continue to develop their skills. Leaders take staff's workload and wellbeing into account. Staff morale is high.

Leaders work in a number of ways to engage parents and the wider community. They use newsletters, social media and weekly 'Sutton shout outs' to communicate successes and important messages. This helps parents to positively contribute to school life.

Overall, leaders create a place where pupils and students enjoy learning, develop hope and ambition and know they are cared for.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas to strengthen in the sixth-form provision. They thoughtfully adjust the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Typically, teachers deliver the curriculum well. This helps students, including those who may face other barriers to learning, to progress smoothly through the curriculum. They largely gain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their futures.

Most students attain in line with the national average, particularly in applied and vocational qualifications. Students sometimes do not attain as well in A-level examinations, particularly those with above-average prior attainment from Year 11. Leaders are reviewing the quality of teaching and the curriculum for these courses to ensure that it is ambitious enough.

Students in the sixth form are well prepared and supported to take their next steps, whether that be higher education, employment or training. They receive one-to-one advice about future careers and benefit from work-related learning opportunities. This helps students to prepare for the world of work. Students experience outings to universities and visits from external speakers, to help them with their choices about their futures. As a result, they are more than ready for life beyond the sixth form.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils at The Sutton Academy, including students in the sixth form, are overwhelmingly proud of their school. They are fully immersed in their learning and have high aspirations. Pupils behave with integrity and have positive relationships with each other and with staff. They know that staff care highly about them. Pupils feel a deep sense of belonging. They want to be in school and most attend regularly. Most pupils attain well in national examinations, including disadvantaged pupils and those with other barriers to learning.

For pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the school's provision is commendable. These pupils receive the highest levels of support and care to help them achieve success and be happy. They access the same rich curriculum as their peers and succeed.

Pupils at The Sutton Academy show that they have been taught to manage their own behaviour. They behave with kindness to each other in lessons and at social times. One contributory factor to this is the personal development and wellbeing curriculum they follow, which has been carefully tailored to be relevant to pupils' lives. Because of this, pupils not only learn about fundamental British values, such as tolerance and respect, they live them out daily. This curriculum also offers them a wide range of opportunities to 'get active, get creative, get inspired'. This includes activities such as martial arts classes, charity fundraising and a wide range of visits to destinations as far as Japan and as close as the local zoo.

Pupils are right to state that unwanted behaviours, such as bullying and derogatory language, are rare. Nevertheless, when incidents do occur, pupils know staff will deal with

these quickly and effectively. As a result of this, they feel safe.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the academic support strategies they use to raise achievement for pupils and students are effective across all subjects and key stages.
 - Leaders should reinforce their efforts to address persistent absence in order to secure high rates of attendance for all pupils.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Challenge Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Andy Moorcroft, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Howard Platt.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with school leaders and staff, trust leaders, trustees and representatives of the local authority during the inspection.

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.

The school currently makes use of 6 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

Principal: Paul Willerton

Lead inspector:

Lisa Corrigan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Katy Robinson, Ofsted Inspector

Kelly Leonard, Ofsted Inspector

Andy Burton, Ofsted Inspector

Gerard Preston, Ofsted Inspector

Shane Richardson, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 16 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,451

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,550

Well above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

40.36%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.51%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

18.88%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	39.1%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39.9%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	39.1%	45.3%	Close to average

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	43.1	46.1	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	43.1	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.06	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.08	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	18.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	25.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	19.8%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	32.6	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	33.6	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.4	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.50	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.65	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	18.3%	53.1%	-34.9 pp
2023/24 (final)	25.3%	53.1%	-27.9 pp
2022/23 (final)	19.8%	52.4%	-32.7 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	32.6	50.4	-17.8
2023/24 (final)	33.6	50.0	-16.4
2022/23 (final)	32.4	50.3	-17.9

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.50	0.16	-0.66
2022/23 (final)	-0.65	0.17	-0.82

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (revised)	83%	92%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	91%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	93%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	23.33	35.00	Below
2023/24 (final)	25.32	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	29.80	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	-0.9	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.7	0.0	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	10.2%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	10.3%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.0%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	27.8%	23.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	27.1%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	28.7%	26.5%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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