

Inspection of Sutton House Academy

Wentworth Road, Southend-On-Sea, Essex SS2 5LG

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join the school with significant gaps in their formal education and with wide-ranging, often complex, needs. Pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are supported well. However, pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read do not always get the precise support they need to help them to read more fluently.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They build positive relationships with staff and trust them to sort things out if they have a problem. While many pupils improve their behaviour and attendance during their time in the school, some do not attend as regularly as they should. Some are not supported well enough to improve their behaviour because the school's behaviour policy is not always applied consistently.

Pupils make good use of the opportunities to take part in sports, including playing football and boxing. They enjoy practical subjects, such as food technology. This helps them to gain important life skills, for example how to budget for and to prepare nutritious meals. Pupils are supported effectively to take their next steps in education at the end of Year 11. Many go on to further studies, training and/or employment when they leave.

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

While leaders have established provision that meets pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs well, the quality of education that pupils receive across the curriculum is variable. Curriculum changes are at an early stage of development. The detail of what pupils need to know and remember to achieve well is not clearly laid out in curriculum plans. The plans do not pinpoint exactly what pupils will need to know to answer the complex questions often set. In some subjects, for example, in mathematics, the new curriculum tries to cover too much, too quickly. Insufficient time is given for pupils to practise and revisit learning so that they remember more of the things they are taught.

Leaders have begun to promote a love of reading, but inconsistencies in teaching mean that pupils are not supported to improve their reading fluency quickly. The books that pupils read are not consistently well matched to the sounds that they are learning. Plans are in place to introduce a new phonics scheme and to train staff in how to deliver it. Regular assessments inform interventions to help pupils to improve their reading ages, but these do not routinely identify the root cause of weaknesses in pupils' spelling and writing.

Leaders have prioritised ongoing work with pupils and families to remove barriers to attendance. While there are individual examples of significant improvements in some pupils' attendance, this work is not yet ensuring that enough pupils attend school as regularly as they should to help them to achieve well.

Incidents of challenging behaviour across the school are reducing. However, some staff are not consistent in applying the school's behaviour policy, especially in challenging pupils who swear or use other inappropriate language. This is not helping pupils to understand how to improve and self-regulate their behaviour.

Pupils' personal development is well promoted. They are taught about how to stay safe, form healthy relationships, and to respect individual differences. They gain confidence over their time in the school. Some older pupils act as mentors to younger pupils. Effective careers information, advice and guidance help them to make choices for their next steps in education, employment and/or training when they leave school at the end of Year 11.

Leaders and governors are focusing on addressing weaknesses in the quality of education through the planned curriculum developments under way. Staff say that leaders are supportive and that morale across the school has improved. They appreciate the range of professional development opportunities available to them on site and through the trust. Well-considered changes to further strengthen governance arrangements are being implemented.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, governors and school staff are mindful of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. All the required staff training is up to date. Staff understand the procedures to follow if they suspect a pupil may be at risk of harm. Leaders have strong relationships with external agencies providing support for vulnerable children, including through children's services and the police. They work effectively to get their pupils the help they need. Safeguarding records are comprehensive. All the required checks on staff suitability to work with children are completed. Pupils are taught how to keep safe in school and out in the community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum and planning for pupils' learning is still under development, including in mathematics. Plans do not detail the precise content that pupils will need to know and remember to achieve well. As a result, some pupils struggle to recall and apply what they should already know to new learning and to different contexts. Leaders must ensure that teachers' planning highlights exactly what pupils need to know, when they will learn it and when important aspects will be revisited to help pupils to remember more of the things that they are taught.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff apply a consistent approach to the teaching of early reading. They have not checked that pupils in the early stages of learning to read are reading books that are matched well to the letters and sounds they

are learning. This means that pupils are not securing fluency in their reading quickly. Leaders need to make sure that the chosen phonics scheme is embedded rapidly, and that staff are trained effectively in how to deliver it.

- While most pupils improve their behaviour during their time in the school, some inappropriate behaviour, such as swearing and occasional use of derogatory language, is not managed well enough. The school's behaviour policy is not applied consistently, and this confuses pupils. Leaders should ensure that all staff are clear about their high expectations of pupils' behaviour and that they are supported to manage it well.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	142940
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10200558
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	The Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Jordan
Headteacher	Alexis Bull
Website	suttonhouse.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened as part of the Parallel Learning Trust on 1 July 2017.
- It offers 60 places for 5- to 16-year-olds referred by the local authority.
- Pupils have been excluded from mainstream settings. Many have had extensive periods away from formal education.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils are White British. Very few are from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior, middle leaders and other school staff, including an early career teacher, two groups of pupils and three representatives of the Parallel Learning Trust, including the director of education.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with the chief executive officer of the trust and the chair of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector also spoke with the director of children’s services for Southend-on-Sea local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into English, including reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education and food technology. This included discussions with subject leaders, visits to lessons, discussions with staff and pupils, and a review of pupils’ work.
- Inspectors checked the school’s single central record and met with the designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors took account of nine free-text comments from parents. There were no responses to Ofsted’s pupil survey, or to the survey for staff. The school’s own surveys for staff and pupils were also considered.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Andrew Hemmings

Her Majesty’s Inspector

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