

General information about Saffron Walden County High School

A local school of exceptional quality

Saffron Walden County High School is an exciting and fulfilling place to work. We welcome applications from ambitious teachers who are committed to excellence both for themselves and the students, and who wish to work in a highly innovative and collaborative learning environment. We seek colleagues who are keen to make a full contribution to the continued development and success of the school, and who wish to take full advantage of the opportunities provided to develop their own skills and expertise. We offer exciting and enriching opportunities to all teachers, be they newly qualified, middle or senior leaders, or aspiring to those positions. We value our staff and do all that we can to nurture and develop them, seeing staff wellbeing as one of the most important aspects of our successful, dynamic and supportive community.

The school

Saffron Walden County High School is a school with a reputation for excellence. In May 2012 OFSTED judged the school to be outstanding in all categories. Amongst many very pleasing comments, the lead inspector wrote in his report: - "the pursuit of excellence is a theme that runs throughout the school." SWCHS serves the attractive market town of Saffron Walden and a number of outlying villages. There are currently around 2000 pupils on roll, including over 600 in the Sixth Form. Demand for places is high and in consequence the school is significantly oversubscribed every year.

Pupils at the school are ambitious and hardworking. Although the school is formal in character, relationships between teachers and pupils are relaxed and friendly. Pupils are pleasant and rewarding to teach.

Saffron Walden is approximately 15 miles from Cambridge and is well placed for rail links directly from Audley End to Liverpool Street Station, approximately 50 minutes away. Access to the M11 is nearby and Stansted Airport is 15 minutes away by train.

The school was founded in 1950 and moved to its present site in 1951. The Executive Headteacher is a National Leader of Education (NLE) and the school is designated as a National Support School. These initiatives have attracted significant extra funding over recent years, which has helped ensure the school's accommodation is modern, spacious and well-designed.

Saffron Academy Trust (SAT)

Our academy trust (Saffron Academy Trust – SAT) aims to establish a local family of schools. In addition to SWCHS, it currently comprises Alec Hunter Academy and Honywood Community School (both Ofsted Good schools in Braintree), Katherine Semar Infant and Junior Schools (both Ofsted Outstanding) and RA Butler Infant and Junior schools (both Ofsted Good) in Saffron Walden. There are many opportunities for teachers and leaders at SWCHS to contribute to the wider work of the Trust.

SWCHS is a National Teaching School (The Saffron Alliance). The school's outreach support work for schools across a wide geographical area provides outstanding professional development opportunities for our staff at all levels. Many County High Staff are also involved in the delivery of innovative CPLD programmes.

GCSE Results

In 2019, results have continued to be outstanding with 36% of grades being 9-7 (the equivalent of A or A*). 289 grade 9s were awarded, which equates to 10% of all entries achieving this highest possible grade. This, together with the higher Attainment 8 score, means that results have continued to improve and ensures that we remain the highest attaining comprehensive school in the county.

	2017	2018	2019
Progress 8 score	+0.18	+0.43	+0.42
Attainment 8 score	5.5	5.8	5.9
Grade 5+ in English & Maths	54%	62%	61%
Grade 4+ in English & Maths	79%	82%	83%
EBacc: %achieved (at grade 5+)	40%	40%	39%
EBacc: Average point score	N/A	5.38	5.43

The Sixth Form

The Sixth Form has developed a reputation for excellence and outstanding academic achievement that is second to none among 11–18 schools in the region. OFSTED described the school's Sixth Form as "outstanding – exemplary in every respect". The Sixth Form offers a wide range of Applied A Level and AS/A2 courses, supplemented by a very wide-ranging enrichment programme. The Sixth Form Centre possesses its own social, study and teaching areas, and is a lively and rewarding environment where students play a major role in the life of the school. Typically, three quarters of Year 11 stay on in the Sixth Form, and are joined by around 100 students drawn from other schools in the area as well as from abroad. In 2014 we opened a post-16 Music Academy (within the Sixth Form) to help develop the potential of talented musicians recruited from SWCHS and schools in the wider local area.

Saffron Walden County High consistently achieves outstanding 'A' Level results. In 2019, 53 students gained A* or A grades in all of their subjects, with 97 A* grades being awarded in total. These results are even better than the high performance in 2018, which placed our sixth form in the top 2% of sixth forms nationally.

The table below shows the main attainment measures over the last 3 years since 2017 when some subjects moved to the reformed A levels. Since 2018, students have sat the more challenging linear A levels in the majority of subjects.

	2017	2018	2019
%A*-A	40	40	40
%A*-B	74	67	68
%A*-C	93	89	90
%A*-E	100	100	100

The Staff

There are at present over 130 full time equivalent teaching staff and over 80 support and administrative staff. Each curriculum area benefits from a resource assistant whose work enables teachers to engage in their proper professional role. A well qualified and trained team of Learning Support Assistants support the work of teachers with pupils having special educational needs.

Successful teaching at SWCHS is underpinned by our policy of Teaching and Learning Excellence (TLE). This approach involves a shared understanding amongst all teaching staff of the key characteristics of excellent classroom practice as well as defining a set of professional development opportunities that identify the very best approaches in the school and then disseminate the ideas more widely. As a consequence, training opportunities abound, with both courses and external partnership work as well as extensive school-based collaborative activity (as part of TLE) in the planning, trialling, delivery and evaluation of strategies to promote outstanding learning.

Major opportunities for professional development also exist as a result of the school's network of partnerships: our sponsorship of Alec Hunter Academy and Honkywood school, our role as a National Teaching School, and a wide ranging primary to secondary transition project. Currently, 13 County High teachers are designated Specialist Leaders of Education. SWCHS has a wide-ranging commitment to initial teacher education as a principal cluster school in partnership with the University of Cambridge for PGCE, and welcomes some 25 teacher trainees each year. SWCHS also co-leads the CTSN SCITT.

Accommodation and Facilities

Located on an extensive site on the edge of Saffron Walden and surrounded by attractive countryside, the school's buildings have undergone considerable extension and modernisation in recent years. Classroom accommodation is modern and spacious, and specialist facilities are extensive. Curriculum Areas all possess resource, office and staff work spaces, and have their rooms grouped geographically. The school boasts fourteen science labs, a suite of specialist Art rooms, specialist rooms for applied A levels in the Sixth Form Centre, purpose built Technology and Mathematics centres, three Drama studios, specialist Music practice rooms and teaching/rehearsal area and a magnificent sports centre with gymnasium, fully equipped dance studio, fitness suite and sports hall. The extensive playing fields include hard tennis courts, an excellent cricket square and an all weather pitch. A large sports pavilion also offers teaching space for PE. Over the past few years, the school has invested heavily in ICT to enhance the classroom experience. All classrooms have a ceiling mounted projector. In addition there are interactive whiteboards in all departments.

Our multi-million pound auditorium (Saffron Hall) with very high quality acoustics was developed in partnership with the Yellow Car Charitable Trust and opened in 2013. As well as acting as the school's main hall, this world class venue stages an annual programme of arts events with a particular focus on bringing leading national and international orchestras and musicians to Saffron Walden. The school has been fortunate in securing sponsorship for student masterclasses and is working with several partners to further develop music and arts education in North Essex. The Saffron Hall project also provided additional accommodation for our Sixth Form, including enlarged private study and social areas.

The curriculum

Most KS3 classes are taught in mixed ability groups, although flexible banding by ability takes place in English and Maths. All pupils follow a common curriculum encompassing English, Mathematics, Science, the Humanities (History, Geography and RE), the Expressive Arts (Art, Drama and Music), Technology, Modern Foreign Languages (both French and German), Computing and PE.

At Key Stage 4, all pupils study Mathematics and English. In Science, students are allocated by ability in Science to a particular GCSE pathway, working towards either Combined or Triple GCSE Science qualifications. All students follow a GCSE course in Religion, Philosophy and Ethics as part of their core provision. In addition, students choose four GCSE options within the curriculum areas outlined above. The majority of students achieve the EBacc.

The Sixth Form curriculum offers extensive choices between a wide range of GCE, Applied GCE and BTEC courses. A very wide range of GCE 'A level' courses is offered. Applied GCE courses include Business, Leisure Studies, Health and Social Care and Science. BTECs are available in Art, Sport and ICT. Students combine courses within three 'Routes of Study', depending on their performance at GCSE. One year 'Gold Route' Business or City & Guilds Animal Care courses offer students who performed less well at GCSE the opportunity to use these course as a bridge into Advanced Level study.

ICT provision

The school has invested heavily in ICT for a number of years and is committed to developing the very best provision in order to enhance teaching and learning, both on the school site and beyond. The school ICT strategy is developed by the Director of ICT in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team.

We run a Windows network with a wide range of applications, including Microsoft Office and subject-specific software programs. We also provide 24/7 home access to the school network for all staff and students. This has given staff greater flexibility in spreading their workload over the day, as well as enabling students to legally use the full range of school software without having to purchase the usual licences.

All classrooms have a ceiling mounted projector linked to the network and several curriculum areas are fully equipped with interactive whiteboards. Staff are encouraged to exploit the potential of interactive technologies to enhance teaching and learning. The school has adopted Moodle as its VLE, which is being used effectively to support teaching and learning in a variety of subjects.

The school's ICT systems are supported by an in-house team of 5 ICT technicians, led by a designated, professionally trained IT Manager. We have approximately 1200 computers, comprising both PCs, laptops and a growing number of tablet devices. Every member of the full-time teaching staff is given a laptop or access to their own desktop in their Area office. Our systems are reliable and staff satisfaction surveys consistently return very positive feedback with regard to the effectiveness of our ICT provision.

Extra-curricular provision

The school provides a rich set of extra-curricular activities. Opportunities for all pupils are available in sports, drama and music. Science Club, Art Club, Farm Club and the Debating Society are all examples of the wide range of activities available. Several hundred students are following the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. The school welcomes members of staff whose interests and expertise allows the extra-curricular provision to grow and flourish. The school has gained a gold award for Sportsmark and platinum in Artsmark.

Pupils benefit from a large number of recreational and educational visits: we undertake regular language trips to Europe; we have annual ski trips for over 200 students; we have a well-established partnership with a school in Beijing and enjoy biennial trips to China with 80 students and 10 staff each time. In addition, we run trips to Zanzibar, the USA and India.

Student Support

The school's support provision is based on the year system. Each year is headed by a Year Achievement Co-ordinator (Head of Year) assisted by a Student Support Officer. The team of tutors' primary focus is concerned with helping pupils achieve their academic potential.

Leadership

Each curriculum area is led by an Area Co-ordinator, assisted by a team of colleagues referred to as the Area Collegiate. They plan, implement and monitor all aspects of teaching and learning in the Area, including the training and development of staff.

The school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the Executive Head, the Associate Headteacher and eight senior colleagues, all with major strategic responsibilities. Area Co-ordinators and Year Achievement Co-ordinators meet in their respective groups once a week and, together with the senior team, form the School Leadership Group.

SAT & Governance

Saffron Academy Trust has adopted a devolved model of governance and seeks to maintain Local Governing Bodies in each of its member schools. The scope of devolution to each LGB is reviewed on a regular basis and is dependent on the performance of the school. Each school is represented on the SAT Board through the LGB chairs and the role of SWCHS as founder school is protected in the memorandum of Governance. The Headteacher at SWCHS acts as Chief Executive of SAT.

Autumn 2019