

Inspection of Saffron Walden County High School

Audley End Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4UH

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 March 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Polly Lankester. This school is part of Saffron 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, Caroline Derbyshire, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Barrs.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this school. Whether they join in the main school or the sixth form, pupils quickly settle in and make friends. There is a strong sense of community. Pupils are extremely proud of their achievements, including beyond the academic. They have the chance to develop their musical interests and skills to a very high level. They love performing in Saffron Hall. The wealth of clubs that pupils attend contributes to their sense of belonging. These include, but are not limited to, the Duke of Edinburgh Award and sports and language clubs. This ensures that there are opportunities for everyone.

Pupils benefit from the high expectations that staff have for their academic achievement. They are incredibly positive about their lessons. Pupils, including in the sixth form, love learning. They display high levels of perseverance when work is challenging. Pupils know they can do well with the high-quality support that they receive from adults.

The school has established a culture where all pupils have a shared understanding of excellent behaviour. Adults are consistent in their expectations for how pupils should behave. Pupils are incredibly courteous and considerate to each other, staff and visitors.

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

The school ensures that pupils achieve academic success and develop a wealth of cultural knowledge and understanding. All pupils benefit from an ambitious and challenging curriculum. Many pupils arrive having exceeded national expectations at primary school. The school takes account of pupils' different needs. The curriculum builds well on pupils' previous learning, so pupils achieve highly.

Teachers have an excellent subject knowledge. They receive regular high-quality training. This ensures that they are skilled in using the most effective strategies to teach the curriculum well. Teachers know what pupils struggle with. They are clear and precise when explaining new information. They plan appropriate activities for pupils to practise their new knowledge. If pupils struggle, teachers are quick to intervene. The support they provide is highly effective in ensuring that pupils can quickly move on with their learning.

Pupils are extremely positive about their lessons. They know they are well supported, and they love the broad range of subjects that they study. As a result, pupils achieve exceptionally well.

The school has prioritised developing pupils' love of reading. Teachers are skilled at teaching pupils subject specific vocabulary, so it is well understood. The school library is welcoming and comfortable. It is well attended while remaining an oasis of calm. Support for weaker readers is highly effective in helping them gain the skills they need to read fluently.

The school welcomes a large, and increasing, number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and education, health and care (EHC) plans. Pupils' individual needs are identified quickly. The school provides bespoke and targeted help, both academically and emotionally. All staff are highly skilled in supporting pupils with SEND, so they access the curriculum and successfully thrive alongside their peers.

Students in the sixth form are supported exceptionally well. Teachers have a clear understanding of what each individual student needs to do well, including those with SEND. They plan challenging activities to expertly build and develop students' knowledge and understanding. Students flourish under their teachers' expert care. They highly value their 'Life Lessons', which prepare them well for the future. The school ensures that students take on responsibilities and set up their own clubs, such as debating. Students achieve very highly.

Pupils display exceptional standards of behaviour. They are respectful and have excellent manners. Relationships between staff and pupils are superb. If pupils need extra support, excellent pastoral care is given in designated areas known as 'B-16' and 'the shed'. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare. If they do occur, the school swiftly intervenes and puts in highly effective additional help.

The provision for pupils' personal development is exemplary. Speakers and external visits are deliberately interwoven into the curriculum to enhance pupils' experiences. Theatre and music trips, opportunities to travel abroad and sports, such as netball, football and rugby, are all extremely popular. Many pupils develop their leadership skills and take up opportunities to become school councillors or reading mentors. The careers programme is extensive and extremely well designed to meet pupils' needs. Pupils leave school with a secure knowledge of the different opportunities available to them.

Trustees and governors are highly effective in helping to secure excellent provision for all pupils. Leaders ensure that staff are very well supported. The overwhelming majority of parents would recommend the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

Unique reference number	136776
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10295031
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2,147
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	629
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Barrs
CEO of the trust	Caroline Derbyshire
Headteacher	Polly Lankester
Website	www.swchs.net
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 May 2012

Information about this school

- The headteacher was the associate headteacher until September 2022 when she became sole headteacher.
- 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.

- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages (MFL), art and design, and history. For each deep dive, the 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.
- 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.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of trustees, the chair of the local governing body and additional governors and reviewed documentation relating to governance and school improvement.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer (CEO) and scrutinised documentation relating to school improvement and quality assurance.
- Inspectors met with school leaders to discuss the school's approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils and staff development.
- Inspectors reviewed behaviour and attendance records and observed pupils' behaviour around site.
- An inspector scrutinised documentation and met with leaders to discuss the school's approach to pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinators (SENCo) and reviewed documentation relating to pupils with SEND.
- The inspectors considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also reviewed responses to Ofsted's staff survey and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Sutton	Ofsted Inspector

James Shapland

Ofsted Inspector

Sarah Fowler

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