

Merchants' Academy

Gatehouse Avenue, Withywood, Bristol, BS13 9AJ

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The drive for excellence shown by leaders and managers has strongly improved teaching and accelerated students' achievement.
- Teachers show that they have high expectations for their students, and students have good attitudes to learning.
- Additional government funding is used well to provide extra support and challenge for groups of disadvantaged students, who make excellent progress.
- The sixth form is good. Teaching and achievement are good, and the curriculum gives students a wide range of choice and opportunity.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well.
- Teaching in most subjects is good with some that is outstanding. The curriculum caters well for the needs of all students and ensures that they enjoy school.
- Staff at all levels are rewarded and encouraged to ensure that students succeed.
- The very experienced governing body is exceptionally effective. Governors provide a high level of support and challenge.
- As a result of careful assessment and good teaching, children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Students' behaviour is good and they say they feel safe in the academy.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are some variations in progress and attitudes to learning between the different age groups.
- Just occasionally more-able students do not always achieve as well as they should.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 42 lessons, of which 14 were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors also made a number of visits to assemblies and tutorial sessions and carried out short visits to classrooms across a range of subjects.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, senior, subject and other leaders, and the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors.
- Inspectors spoke to students in lessons, at breaks and at lunchtimes. They also met formally with various groups of students.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation, including the academy's checks on how well it is doing, the school improvement plan, and statistical information about students' progress, achievement, behaviour and exclusions. They looked at the work of a wide range of students.
- Inspectors looked at the academy's documentation relating to the management of the work of staff, training arrangements for teachers and other staff, lesson observations, and arrangements for the safeguarding of students and for governance.
- Inspectors took into account the 34 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and correspondence from parents.
- Inspectors took into account the 87 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Christine Young, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Hilary Green	Additional Inspector
Stephen Daniels	Additional Inspector
Timothy McGuire	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Merchants' Academy is an average-sized academy which amalgamated with Gay Elms Primary School to become an all-through academy in April 2013. The academy's sponsors are University of Bristol and the Society of Merchant Venturers.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is above average. This is additional money allocated by the government for students who are looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported by school action is above the national average, as is the proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school has specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs in the Autism Resource Base, which takes up to 28 pupils from the ages of 4 to 11.
- The school works in partnership with Bristol Grammar School, Bristol Cathedral Choir School, Oasis John Williams, Colston Girls' School and the City Academy.
- There is no off-site provision for students in the academy.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum levels expected for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that students make rapid progress and sustain highly positive attitudes to learning across every key stage by:
 - sharing the existing good and outstanding practice effectively across the academy to enable teachers to learn from each other
 - ensuring that teachers consistently show high expectations for what students, particularly the most able, can achieve by providing work that is challenging and demanding.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students coming into the academy have significantly lower levels of achievement than those found nationally. Despite this, they make at least good progress over time across the academy. The progress that has been made in a relatively short time since becoming an all-age academy shows the impact of the academy's continued efforts to raise standards.
- Over the last three years, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at A* to C including English and mathematics has continued to rise. The school's current data suggest that this will continue in 2014 to 59%, which is broadly in line with the 2013 national averages. The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that they finish the Reception Year with attainment that is broadly average. They are inquisitive and excited about learning, and are very able and willing to express their ideas to each other and other adults.
- Predicted outcomes for 2014 in the Year 1 screening check in phonics (the sounds that letters make) indicate that 72% will achieve the expected standards. This demonstrates good progress given the low starting points of many of the pupils.
- Achievement in Key Stages 1 and 2 is not easy to judge. In 2013, the Key Stage 2 test results were annulled by the examination board following an official enquiry. However, the academy's current predictions for 2014 indicate pupils are set to achieve results in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils read with confidence and enthusiasm. In mathematics, pupils are given opportunities to solve problems and to apply their understanding to real-life situations. This helps them to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts and secure their knowledge and skills.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress and expectations are high to ensure they progress at the same rate as other students. They receive targeted support, excellent care and encouragement to help them succeed.
- Students supported by the pupil premium make equally good progress in English and mathematics. In 2013 those in Year 11 were on average approximately half a GCSE grade behind their classmates. The academy is meeting the needs of individual students well, and through carefully guided support, this gap in achievement is rapidly narrowing.
- Students with complex learning needs who attend the Autism Resource Base often join the school with very low attainment levels. The strong support and nurturing they receive enable them to make good progress, not just academically, but also in their personal and social development. They are helped to overcome the barriers to their learning and achieve well.
- There is some variation in the progress students make across year groups. Leaders have been quick to implement the changes needed to address previous weaknesses in the quality of leadership and teaching, especially in Key Stage 1 and 2. Changes in staffing, combined with a clear direction for the development of teaching and learning, are already beginning to have a positive impact and pupils' progress is improving.
- The most able students are not always challenged enough and do not always make as much

progress they should.

- Actions taken since the previous inspection have changed the culture of the sixth form and are now having a positive impact on raising standards. Although achievement and success rates in the sixth form are below the national average, the school's current predictions for Year 12 and 13 show that students are on track to reach or exceed their challenging targets.
- The Year 7 'catch-up' funding is used effectively to provide good support for any students in Year 7 who find reading difficult. As a result, these students are making good progress in improving their literacy skills.
- The primary school sport funding has provided pupils with opportunities to participate in sporting activities that help them to develop healthy lifestyles and develop their physical well-being.

The quality of teaching is good

- In the vast majority of lessons, teachers know their students well and plan learning activities accordingly. Teachers generally show high expectations of students and relationships are always highly positive.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. This is supported by well-organised and rigorous assessment and tracking of children's progress. Teachers have high expectations and enable children to make good progress. Adults in the Reception class provide a particularly wide range of interesting, practical activities, indoors and outside, that show a very good understanding of how young children learn. The letters that make sounds (phonics) are taught systematically and well.
- Teachers are very skilled in helping students to develop an in-depth understanding of the topics being taught. Teachers also support students' skills around knowing how they can learn more effectively.
- Teachers routinely use information on what students know and can do to challenge them. As a result, activities which help build on what they know are imaginative and stimulate students' curiosity. Students are encouraged to learn from each other and they work happily together.
- The high-quality marking commentaries used by teachers across the academy have a big impact on students' progress. Students often enter into a two-way dialogue with their teacher, which enables them to understand what they have to do to improve their work and what they need to do to make better progress. This dialogue also recognises the insight shown by students in the quality of their responses.
- The school has had a significant focus on improving literacy and numeracy skills for those students performing below expected levels through specialist support from teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors. This has had an impact on students' understanding and progress.
- The specialist teachers and support staff in the Autism Resource Base provide well-chosen additional support including small-group work and one-to-one teaching. This develops students' communication skills, social skills and helps them build their self-esteem, confidence and ability to value others.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work together to provide support that is linked closely to the

accurate assessments they make of students' abilities. This ensures that all groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, make good progress.

- Just occasionally, more-able students are not given sufficiently challenging activities and this results in them not achieving their potential.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teaching in history, physical education and science constantly challenges students to deepen their understanding, builds their motivation and produce high quality responses leading to outstanding progress. Teachers set very challenging targets that students strive to achieve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They are typically keen to do their best in class. 'Behaviour for learning' in Key Stages 1 and 2 is good overall and this helps to build older students' enthusiasm and motivation for learning.
- Students are good ambassadors for their academy; they are calm, polite and courteous both in the classroom and around the school. They show a respect for each other and are proud of their school. The atmosphere in school is one of tolerance, sharing and learning together.
- Students collaborate effectively in class activities and discussion, listen well and respect the views of others. Some articulate their ideas confidently and others are developing these skills. Through interacting with the teacher, they develop a greater depth of understanding and learn effectively.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, take great pride in their school and demonstrate that they have a very clear and moral sense of what is right and wrong. They take part in fundraising activities for the World Wide Foundation, Penny Broolin Cancer Care, the Macmillan Cancer Trust and the Rainbow Centre Bedminster. They have links with schools in Uganda, Ethiopia, Turkey and Kenya.
- Students mostly show highly positive attitudes to learning, although there is some inconsistency, especially where activities are not planned well enough to keep pupils interested and motivated. In these lessons students do not learn as much as they could.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The school meets all statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding. All documentation is meticulously completed. All staff are appropriately trained and are aware of child protection and risk assessment procedures.
- Students say they feel safe. They understand risk and have a very good understanding of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying. They say that there is very little bullying at the academy and express great confidence that should any happen, it would be dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported particularly well. Students, including those in the sixth form, take on extra roles of responsibility such as house captains, supporting younger students, especially with literacy support. Students are able to become members of the 'parliament', which gives them a voice in shaping the future of the academy.
- Attendance is broadly average and is improving across the academy, reflecting students'

enjoyment in learning. The attendance of students supported by the pupil premium funding is also broadly average; far fewer students are persistently absent than normally found nationally.

- Students' enjoyment of school makes a significant contribution to the behaviour shown; it also makes a positive contribution to their moral and social development.
- The responses to Parent View indicate that most parents agree that their children are very safe in the academy, are happy and are well looked after.

The leadership and management are good

- The principal's sharp focus on improvement is driven by a passionate belief that all students, irrespective of their circumstances, are entitled to the best education possible. This is a school where leaders are striving to create an all-age learning community where all have an equal chance to succeed.
- The leadership of teaching is good. The academy has introduced more effective ways of managing how well teachers perform. Leaders' monitoring is accurate and clearly identifies the skills that staff need to improve.
- Leaders' rigorous analysis of students' progress provides all teachers and governors with a clear understanding of the academy's performance. The academy's track record, reflected in the rising trend in achievement and effective teaching, demonstrates its capacity for continued improvement.
- There is a strong focus on the development of subject leaders in improving teaching. The quality of teachers' work and students' progress is linked to pay rises and promotion, and also to the national *Teachers' Standards*.
- Senior, subject and other leaders are analytical and effective. They have the support and loyalty of staff and students. They have a very clear and accurate view of what the academy needs to do to improve further.
- Good and improving leadership of the sixth form is having an impact on students' attitudes to learning and their aspirations for the future, and raising overall standards of achievement. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The partnership with the University of Bristol is helping to raise sixth form students' aspirations, enhancing students' learning and guiding them towards future careers and lifelong learning.
- The academy makes detailed and accurate analyses of its performance at every level from Early Years Foundation Stage through to sixth form. Students are set challenging targets and leaders make very good use of this information in order to identify where extra help and support is needed to improve the progress of particular students.
- The curriculum is well matched to the abilities and interests of the students. Extensive use is made of partnerships with other schools to enhance the activities on offer, and give students extra support and guidance to improve their learning experiences and achievement.
- Assemblies focus on values and encourage students to reflect. The vast range of opportunities

for students to develop their artistic, sporting and physical well-being, combined with trips, visits, and links with other cultures, develop their awareness of society and prepare them well for later life.

- The academy provides a weekly 'co-curricular afternoon' for all students. This provides excellent opportunities for students of all ages to engage in a wide range of activities where they learn new skills, discover new talents, learn to work as a team and build confidence as individuals.
- Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities. These include sports, art, music, drama, debating, the Army Cadet Force, Duke of Edinburgh Award and The Matthew Cadets, all of which greatly enhance leadership and learning.
- The academy uses a range of independent education consultants to help assess how well it is doing.
- Parents are generally positive about the academy. Some expressed some disagreement with aspects of the school's work through Parent View. However, other school-based surveys reflect an extremely high level of parental appreciation of the significant improvements in what the academy does for their children.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors provide high-quality support. They have a detailed and accurate awareness of well the academy is doing.
- Regular meetings help governors to maintain a thorough and balanced overview of the effectiveness of the school, its management and the quality of teaching. They have an excellent understanding of students' performance data, and regularly update their training needs.
- The governing body is aware of how the academy spends the pupil premium funding and works with leaders to monitor the progress of students who are eligible for the additional support.
- The governing body is fully aware of the academy's system for managing staff performance. This helps governors to accurately assess each teacher's performance against the pay they receive.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135597
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	439928

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1045
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Curling
Principal	Anne Burrell
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2011
Telephone number	0117 301 5000
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