

# Merrill Academy

Brackens Lane, Alvaston, Derby, DE24 0AN

**Inspection dates** 15–16 October 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- In 2014, students' attainment in English and mathematics was low.
- Students, including the most able, those who speak English as an additional language, and those with disabilities and special educational needs, do not make as much progress as they could. The quality of support given by teaching assistants is variable.
- The students supported by the pupil premium do not achieve as well as other students in the school. Leaders do not analyse the effectiveness of the funding used to support these students.
- School leaders do not make sufficient use of information about students' attainment and progress to enable them to help students achieve their potential.
- School improvement planning is not as effective as it could be as it does not include measurable success criteria to ensure rapid improvement.
- Behaviour and attendance have improved, although some students disturb the learning of others. Too many students are late for school.
- The quality of teachers' planning and marking is improving, but remains variable and does not always take account of students' needs or next steps.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students now achieve national minimum standards. Those who re-take English and mathematics GCSE are not always successful.

### The school has the following strengths

- The Principal has brought much-needed stability to the academy and has led on transforming areas that were previously inadequate, particularly behaviour.
- Governors are highly skilled and rigorously hold school leaders to account.
- Those students on vocational courses achieve well, as a result of effective teaching.
- Leaders, supported by the sponsor, have brought about recent significant improvements in teaching and leadership.
- Subject leaders are improving their effectiveness in monitoring standards.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 30 lessons; eight were jointly observed with members of the leadership team.
- Several classes were visited to check on students' attitudes to learning. Inspectors also visited form rooms and an assembly.
- An inspector listened to students read.
- Inspectors scrutinised students' work in mathematics, English, history and science.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior leaders, the head of post 16, the co-ordinator for special educational needs, four subject leaders and four members of the governing body including the chair. The lead inspector also spoke with three members of the Derby College Education Trust and a representative from the local authority.
- The lead inspector interviewed representatives from Derby College who manage the alternative provision.
- Inspectors spoke with four groups of students formally and informally in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors took into account the 21 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors took into account 38 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed a variety of documents, including: the academy's self-evaluation summary, the academy improvement plan, governing body minutes, anonymised performance management documents, records of referrals made to external agencies and records on attendance and behaviour. They looked at the academy's analysis of the 2014 examination results and the predicted results for those students currently in Years 10, 11 and post 16.

## Inspection team

Julia Wright, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Watson	Additional Inspector
Jeremy Seymour	Additional Inspector
Robert Steed	Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.*

### Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school is sponsored by Derby College Education Trust (DCET) and opened in January 2013.
- Just over 60% of students are supported by the pupil premium which is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for looked after children.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than that found nationally. Approximately half of students are from White British backgrounds, and half are from a variety of ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average and this number is increasing each year.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, is below average, but increasing.
- Alternative placements in a range of vocational subjects, for Key Stage 4 students are provided by Derby College. A small number of post-16 students also access advanced level psychology at Derby College.
- The school does not meet the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' achievement.

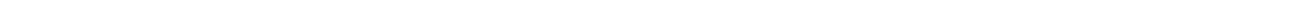
### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all students make the progress that they are capable of by ensuring that all teachers:
  - have high expectations for all groups of students, both in the main school and sixth form, so that none underachieves
  - improve the regularity and consistency of marking and feedback so that students are consistently clear about how to improve their work, have opportunities to respond to marking and make rapid progress
  - ensure that all lessons are planned using assessment information to provide opportunities for all students, to make good progress
  - use the support of teaching assistants more effectively to improve standards for disabled students and those who have special educational needs rapidly
  - improve the level of support given to students who speak English as an additional language
  - provide regular homework to strengthen and deepen students' knowledge and understanding.
- Improve behaviour and attendance by:
  - eradicating disruptive behaviour in lessons
  - taking further action to improve students' punctuality.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - analysing and using information about students' assessments to plan effective learning
  - ensuring that sixth-form students are able to achieve their entitlement for English and mathematics qualifications
  - ensuring that the school improvement plan identifies measurable success criteria and indicates who will

be responsible for measuring effectiveness

- ensuring that information about pupil premium spending is analysed to determine its effectiveness in raising achievement for the students it is intended for.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.



## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- School leaders do not make effective use of information about students' attainment and progress. Systems for recording this information are in place. However, leaders do not analyse this information in a timely fashion and, as a result, groups of students including the most able and those who speak English as an additional language, underachieve.
- The school improvement plan contains insufficient measurable success criteria and appropriate milestones. The plan does not include appropriate timescales and school leaders are unable to ensure groups of students are making rapid progress. This limits the effectiveness by which governors can hold leaders to account.
- In the last academic year the large number of temporary teachers adversely affected the progress and achievement of some students. Leaders have now ensured that staffing is more stable; students are starting to make better progress.
- Development of students' literacy and numeracy skills are variable. An accelerated reading scheme, used for weaker readers is enabling them to make rapid gains in their learning. This scheme is not effective for students who speak English as an additional language because basic knowledge of English is required to access these schemes.
- Academy leaders' previous judgements of teaching over time were inaccurate. They now use a range of measures, including the scrutiny of students' work to inform their judgements. As a result, the leadership of teaching is becoming increasingly effective and students are making more progress.
- Decisive action is being taken to eradicate inadequate teaching. Staff training is linked to performance management needs. Teachers are rewarded for improvements that they make. As a result, both staff morale and the quality of teaching are improving.
- Subject leaders are using a more systematic approach to monitoring standards, and have developed their own improvement plans. They are growing in confidence and becoming increasingly effective.
- Leaders do not analyse the effectiveness of the funding used to support pupil premium students. It is used on a wide variety of initiatives including one-to-one support and reading programmes. In 2014 too many of these students did not make sufficient progress.
- Catch-up funding is used to support reading programmes, resources for numeracy and one-to-one support for eligible Year 7 students. This is effective in improving the levels of progress that these students make.
- The curriculum has been suitably adapted to meet the needs of different groups of students including the most able and those with low levels of literacy. Appropriate vocational courses are also offered, tailored to students' next steps. School leaders provide appropriate advice and guidance.
- Academy leaders employ effective strategies for engaging with parents. A recent coffee morning, led by a Czech speaker, was organised for families of students who speak English as an additional language. As a result, there is growing interest in students wishing to attend the academy.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Leaders have highly effective systems for pinpointing those at risk and ensuring that appropriate actions are taken. They are rigorous in monitoring the progress, attendance and behaviour of those attending alternative provision.
- The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strengthening. Personal, social, citizenship and health education is provided through 'deep learning' days, assemblies and discrete lessons. These activities provide good opportunities for students to celebrate differences, explore equal opportunities and prepare for life in modern Britain.

- The Principal has brought much-needed stability to the academy after a period of turbulence. Leaders' self-evaluation of the academy's performance is accurate. Supported by his leadership team, he has established a culture of high expectations and transformed areas that were previously inadequate. In particular, members of the school community, including the students, comment on substantial improvements in students' behaviour.
- The academy works collaboratively with other schools in Derby and continues to commission the support of the local authority.
- Representatives of the DCET have a clear vision for the academy and are highly committed to drive improvement. The sponsors have given careful consideration to succession planning by prioritising the development of middle leaders. They are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and have a secure understanding of what is needed to improve the outcomes for students rapidly.

#### ■ The governance of the school:

- Governors provide high levels of challenge to school leaders.
- They are highly skilled and have a very good understanding of the issues affecting the school. They have taken decisive action to appoint a substantive Principal after a long period of instability. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and ensure that actions are taken to address any weaknesses.
- They are acutely aware that achievement of students is not improving rapidly enough and have put actions in place to address this.
- Performance management arrangements are effective. There is a clear link between performance management and pay. Governors rightly use their powers to withhold pay rises where they are not merited.
- There is clear delegation of responsibility between the Derby College Education Trust and the local governing body.
- Governors ensure that there is efficient management of financial resources. Recent decisions to limit the choice of post-16 courses have been driven by this. The use of additional funding is reviewed regularly at meetings.
- A nominated governor maintains an oversight of the school's single central record. The school's systems for safeguarding meet current national requirements.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

### requires improvement

#### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Too many students are late for school. School leaders have taken actions to address this; it is too early to measure if this has been successful.
- When teaching engages the students, they behave well and follow the instructions of their teachers. However, some lessons are still disrupted by students' poor behaviour. Academy leaders and teachers are beginning to employ effective strategies to manage behaviour. This includes the use of a 'quiet room' to de-escalate incidents of poor behaviour. The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions has reduced significantly.
- The majority of students take pride in their appearance. However, some older students are not challenged sufficiently about what they are wearing. As a result, a few students do not comply with the uniform code.
- The majority of students conduct themselves well and show respect and courtesy towards each other and adults when moving around school. Teachers stand at their doors to supervise corridor behaviour and welcome students to their rooms. Students generally take pride in their environment and there is very little litter.

- Students are aware of the various forms of bullying, including homophobic and cyber-bullying. Academy leaders have been rigorous in addressing issues of inappropriate language. Incidents of bullying have declined over the last year and students say it is uncommon.
- The academy's strategies to improve attendance have been successful. The attendance of those students in the academy since it was established is improving and is now in line with national levels. The proportion of students who are regularly absent from school has also improved.
- The large majority of parents who responded to the parents' questionnaire were positive about the academy's management of behaviour.
- Academy leaders, governors and students all comment on how behaviour has improved in the last year.

### Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say that they feel safe and parents agree. Risk assessments are secure.
- Those that attend alternative provision, are registered in school and transported to the college. Effective systems are in place to monitor non-attendance.
- All members of staff have undertaken appropriate child protection training and received additional training in specific safeguarding issues, including female genital mutilation. Those spoken with were aware of the procedures to follow if a child was at risk.
- Students have a good understanding of ways to stay safe. They know about the importance of staying safe when using the internet. The 'Prevent' team have recently visited assemblies to alert students to issues of extremism and e-safety. Students are confident that they could report any issue to staff, and action would be taken.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Improvements to the quality of teaching during the past year have eradicated inadequate teaching. Learning is no longer inadequate and students make good progress in many lessons. Nevertheless, teaching requires improvement because this more effective teaching is not consistent across all subjects and year groups.
- Teachers do not always make enough use of the information about how well the students are doing, to devise lessons and activities that challenge them fully. In particular, the most-able students are not always provided with different activities and experiences that extend their learning sufficiently. In a mathematics exercise book, one such student had written 'I found this work too easy'. As a result, the most-able are not making as much progress as they could.
- Teachers do not always plan carefully enough to deploy teaching assistants as effectively as they could to support disabled students and those with special educational needs with their learning.
- Students' attitudes to learning are variable. Usually, they settle quickly and respond well to the teacher's instructions. This is because teachers know them well and have carefully planned the work to meet their needs. In a few lessons, teachers have not developed consistent classroom routines to challenge poor behaviour. As a result, students in these lessons do not fully engage in their learning.
- Teachers do not all adhere to the homework timetable. Homework is not set regularly enough and students do not have sufficient opportunity to extend their learning.
- There is increasing evidence that teachers ensure that spelling, punctuation and grammar are corrected. Key words are routinely displayed in classrooms. However, not enough is done to support groups of

students who speak English as an additional language, particularly when they first join the school. As a result, these students are not making the progress that similar students make nationally.

- The quality of marking is improving and all teachers are regularly marking books. Where this is most effective, teachers use marking to pinpoint next steps for students and provide them with an appropriate activity to complete in response. As a result, these students take pride in their work and make rapid progress.
- Students are becoming increasingly confident at reading aloud. Students with low levels of literacy, who are not new to English, are being supported by a number of bespoke reading programmes. As a result, the levels of literacy for younger students are starting to improve.
- Teaching is increasingly effective over time. A 'Champions Group' of teachers is instrumental in sharing and developing good practice. Many teachers plan well, have high expectations of all students and use appropriate techniques to secure high levels of engagement.

### **The achievement of pupils is inadequate**

- Students enter and leave the academy with standards that are well below average. This is the result of a legacy of slow progress. Recent improvements to teaching are reversing this weakness. However, attainment remains low. Standards in English and mathematics are well below national figures. Consequently, achievement is inadequate.
- In 2014, at the end of Year 11, those students known to be eligible for the pupil premium were just over a grade behind others in English and just under a grade in mathematics. Although improving, their overall progress is well below other students nationally. Current assessments show that this gap is narrowing fast.
- The most-able students are not reaching the standards that they could. Recent improvements, in teaching and leadership, mean that the progress that these students are making is accelerating.
- Students who speak English as an additional language make less progress in English and mathematics than similar students nationally. They are not given sufficient support when they join the school.
- Students with disabilities and special educational needs do not achieve the standards that they should at Key Stage 4. However, they are well-supported through the nurture programme at Key Stage 3 and a large proportion of them are now making expected progress in English and mathematics.
- The academy does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Work in students' books and progress seen in lessons indicates that students are on track to meet national expectations in 2015. This is a result of recent improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Students on vocational courses achieve well, as a result of effective teaching. In particular, the large majority of students on alternative provision at Derby College completed their courses and progressed to higher levels of courses at the college. The number of students who are not in education or employment when they leave school is low.

### **The sixth form provision requires improvement**

- Academy leaders do not routinely monitor or analyse the information about post-16 students. As a result, the head of sixth form does not have a clear overview of students' achievement, and this limits opportunities to ensure that students make as much progress as they could.
- Students who re-take English and mathematics GCSE are not always as successful as they should be.



School leaders are now introducing alternative courses to address this.

- Students now achieve national minimum standards in their advanced level subjects. The standards they reach in vocational courses are higher than those they reach in academic ones. This is due to highly effective teaching on these courses; students say that these teachers 'go an extra ten miles to ensure that we learn well'.
- Teachers have high expectations and use questioning effectively. Most students know how to improve their work. There are no significant differences between the achievement of different groups in the sixth form.
- The post-16 study programme is effective. Those studying 'A2' psychology at Derby College are making progress. Students receive effective guidance to ensure that they are taking the right courses. The majority follow a combined route of academic and vocational courses that provide them with appropriate challenge. This is evidenced by the high retention rates.
- There are good opportunities for students to access work experience and develop their employability skills. All students progress to the next steps in their education.
- Students are highly positive about their sixth-form experience and behaviour is good.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139051
<b>Local authority</b>	Derby
<b>Inspection number</b>	447839

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	856
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	112
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Heather Simcox
<b>Principal</b>	Andrew Scott
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 November 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01332 576777
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