

Merritts Brook Primary E-ACT Academy

Trescott Road, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 5QD

Inspection dates

24–25 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Early years provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The academy is well led and managed. The Principal, supported by other academy leaders and the academy's governing body, has taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety since the academy opened.
- Standards are rising because all groups of pupils make good progress. Attainment has improved markedly this year.
- Teaching is good, particularly in reading and mathematics. Teachers plan interesting and challenging activities which help pupils to make good progress in both subjects.
- Teachers give pupils clear guidance, both written and oral, which enables them to learn well. The thoughtful marking provided in mathematics, in particular, helps pupils to make rapid progress.
- Pupils enjoy life at the academy and feel safe. Their good behaviour helps them to learn successfully.
- The academy's core values are embedded throughout all aspects of the academy's work. As a result, pupils thrive in a positive, caring and nurturing atmosphere.
- Staff promote pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development very successfully. Consequently, pupils contribute well to the whole academy community and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- From very low starting points, children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are quickly developing the skills that they need for successful learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always use questioning techniques effectively to challenge pupils or deepen their understanding, particularly in the case of the most-able pupils.
- Marking in writing is not always helpful enough to enable pupils improve their work.
- Subject leaders do not always check that advice given to teachers to secure outstanding achievement is swiftly acted upon.
- Pupils do not write at length or often enough, so their progress in writing is not as high as it is in reading and mathematics.
- A minority of pupils are absent too often, and this restricts their progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited fourteen lessons to observe learning and behaviour, to talk to pupils and to examine displays. The Principal and Vice Principal accompanied inspectors during all of these observations.
- Inspectors spoke and listened to different groups of pupils, heard pupils read and looked at a range of work from different subjects. The inspectors observed pupils at the start of the day, during playtimes and at lunchtime. They also spoke to pupils informally around the academy.
- Inspectors met with the Principal, Vice Principal, teachers who hold additional responsibilities, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the academy’s sponsor. During the inspection, inspectors also spoke to parents when they visited the academy.
- Responses from 10 parents to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire, and the 23 questionnaires that were returned by staff, were taken into account. Inspectors also looked at the results of the academy’s own surveys of pupils and parents.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, which included: the academy’s check on how well it is doing and plans for improvement; evidence about how teachers are set targets to improve pupils’ progress; records of the academy’s checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of meetings of the local governing body, information about pupils’ progress over time; and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Simon Mosley, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Sandra Hayes

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Merritts Brook Primary E-ACT Academy is part of a chain of academies sponsored by E-ACT. It opened on 1 January 2013. It is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Around two thirds of the pupils are of White British heritage. The remainder come from many different ethnic groups. Most pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority) is well above the national average.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of one part-time Nursery class and one full-time Reception class.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The academy has a local governing body, which is a sub-committee of the E-ACT board.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure outstanding achievement for all pupils by ensuring that:
 - teachers' questioning deepens pupils' understanding and helps them make accelerated progress
 - teachers provide consistently high levels of challenge for all pupils, and particularly the most-able pupils
 - teachers' marking in writing is as clear and helpful to pupils as it is in mathematics
 - teachers act on the advice they are given by subject leaders to improve achievement
 - pupils write more frequently and for longer periods of time.
- Ensure that staff work closely with the small number of parents whose children are too frequently absent.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal, supported by other key leaders, has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement and has taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety. This has resulted in a highly positive ethos that pervades all the academy's work and ensures pupils behave well and are keen to learn.
- Leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils. Plans for improvement reflect a realistic assessment of the academy's current position. Leaders have accurately identified what needs to improve in the academy, and this informs all their actions. Leaders monitor progress with these developments closely.
- Systems implemented by the Principal to manage teachers' performance are good. Targets for staff link to the national standards, as well as to the academy's own priorities for improving teaching and achievement. Leaders offer appropriate support and challenge to staff and both the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils have improved as a result.
- Staff with leadership responsibilities generally drive developments in their areas well. They have brought about improvements in several areas, and particularly in mathematics, the Early Years Foundation Stage, and in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. However, in some instances, subject leaders are too slow to check that their advice has been implemented by staff or sustained in their subjects, so improvements are not always as rapid as they could be.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' achievement and readiness for the next stage in their education. It provides stimulating experiences which capture pupils' interest and imagination while ensuring pupils' skills build systematically across a wide range of subjects. It also gives a strong basis for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The academy's core values: hope, honesty, respect, resilience, co-operation, patience, courage and thoughtfulness, are strongly emphasised throughout the curriculum. Pupils also learn about key feature of Britain's way of life, such as democracy and fairness. This helps prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- Academy leaders have used primary sports funding effectively to increase participation in a wider variety of sports and physical activities and to promote healthy lifestyles and physical well-being. Sports coaches have arranged high quality training for staff and pupils. As a result, staff feel more confident about delivering sporting and other physical activities. Pupils say their experiences and skills have improved and they are also confident of their ability to lead sporting activities at lunchtime.
- Academy leaders use pupil premium funding well. A 'Pupil Premium Champion' and a nominated governor keep a close check on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium who are currently in the academy have made progress that is similar or better than other pupils nationally this year. Consequently, their attainment is rapidly improving.
- The academy tackles discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity for all groups of pupils well; as a result, almost all groups of pupils make good progress. Leaders recognise that they need to offer more consistent levels of challenge to the most able, including in the early years. However, as soon as any individual or group of pupils is identified as not achieving well, staff in the academy take prompt action to remedy this situation.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. Staff and governors have received the appropriate training and, as the academy works closely with other agencies, is able to ensure that pupils who may be at risk are well protected.
- Parents are becoming increasingly involved in the life of the academy. For example, almost all parents listen to their children read at home. During the inspection, the parents' coffee morning and the Nursery open afternoon were well attended. The parents who spoke with inspectors were positive about improvements since the academy opened. A large majority of those who responded to Parent View would recommend the academy and believe that it is well led and managed.

■ The sponsor has categorised Merritt's Brook as an 'improving' academy and provided appropriate levels of support since September 2014. During this time, support has included representatives from E-ACT working with the local governing body, a review of the quality of teaching and the induction of the new business manager. These actions have helped the academy to improve.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The Chair of the Governing Body, supported by other governors, contributes well to the ethos of the academy. Governors meet with parents, pupils and staff on a regular basis and have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the academy.
- Governors are recruited for their particular skills; they support and challenge as required. For example, they understand information about pupils' achievement and how the academy compares with other schools, and use this knowledge to inform questions and prompt further action.
- Governors have a good understanding of how leaders manage teachers' performance. They know what is done to tackle underperformance, should it occur and ensure that only those teachers who can show they have improved pupils' achievement, progress through the salary scale points.
- The governing body oversees spending well. Governors know how the pupil premium and sports funding have been spent and they are aware of their impact.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good and firmly rooted in the academy's core values. These values give the pupils a secure framework to behave well.
- There is a calm atmosphere within the academy because pupils move sensibly around the building, play with consideration for others in the playground and understand the importance of treating others fairly.
- Pupils are polite and friendly towards each other and with adults. They listen carefully in assembly and treat their surroundings with respect.
- Pupils say that other pupils behave well. A large majority of the parents, who expressed a view, also felt that the academy makes sure its pupils are well behaved.
- Academy leaders have been successful in supporting pupils who have demonstrated less positive behaviour in the past. Actions taken have reduced the number of exclusions in the last year. Behaviour logs indicate that poor behaviour is rare and dealt with effectively.
- Pupils enjoy life at the academy and attendance has improved. Almost all pupils are punctual in the morning and all arrive to lessons on time and ready to learn. In only a small minority of cases is attendance poor. The great majority are proud to be members of the academy community and they are keen to take responsibility.
- Attitudes to learning are good. Pupils behave well in lessons; they work well together in pairs and larger groups, and can be trusted to concentrate on their own work without reminders. They usually listen carefully, follow instructions, respond positively to clearly established routines and complete tasks to the best of their ability.
- The attention of a few pupils wanders off task when teaching does not fully capture their interest. However, on the rare occasions that pupils are distracted from their learning, a quiet word from an adult returns them quickly to their studies.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Consequently, pupils feel secure and most parents agree that their children feel safe in academy. Pupils are taught to stay safe, including when using the internet, and they behave in a way that ensures that they all remain safe. The large site has good

physical security to control visitor access.

- Adults are fully trained in how to look for signs that pupils might be at risk and take quick action when concerns arise.
- Bullying is rare. Pupils understand what it means to be unkind to someone and they are aware of different kinds of bullying. They told inspectors that differences are accepted but they are also confident that staff will deal quickly and effectively with any unkindness if it happens. The academy's records confirm that this is the case.
- Pupils benefit from a carefully structured programme that prepares them well for their future education and life in modern Britain. For example, children in the early years setting are trained to be 'safety inspectors', and check that the outdoor learning area is free from hazards.

The quality of teaching is good

- Since the academy opened, teaching has had a good impact on pupils' learning in a range of subjects, including reading and mathematics. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. As a result, almost all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make good progress.
- Well-designed classrooms support pupils' learning. Attractive displays motivate pupils and celebrate their achievements. Helpful advice and resources are readily available to support pupils if they are stuck. Secure relationships between teachers and pupils help pupils to gain the confidence to challenge themselves and take risks in their learning.
- Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and generally use this information to set appropriately challenging tasks for pupils of different abilities. However, at times, the work is too easy for the most-able pupils. When this happens, teachers do not always notice or respond quickly enough by increasing the level of challenge in the lesson. This sometimes happens because the teacher has not used questioning effectively to check how well pupils are learning.
- Teachers usually plan interesting lessons which absorb pupils in their learning. Activities make pupils think, reflect, discuss, investigate and form opinions. Occasionally, teachers do not encourage pupils to get on with their work quickly enough. This can lead to pupils becoming bored and fidgety.
- Most marking gives useful advice to help pupils improve their work, particularly in mathematics. Through marking, teachers unpick pupils' misconceptions and help pupils to apply their mathematical understanding to solve challenging questions. Marking does not have the same striking impact on pupils' writing as it does in mathematics and, to a lesser extent, in reading. This is because the guidance given is not as clear. Pupils do not use teachers' suggestions to make instant improvement in their writing, often because the comments have not helped improve their understanding.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on the teaching of reading and pupils now read regularly. However, pupils of all abilities are not given sufficient opportunities to write at length in English and other subjects.
- Support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together to ensure pupils understand and can cope with the work they have been set. Consequently, they make the same good progress as their peers.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Teachers keep a close check on children's progress and modify planning to address gaps in their skills and understanding. As a result, children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Teaching contributes strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn to think deeply about challenging social issues and they develop empathy and sensitivity to other people's difficulties. Pupils learn to be creative, for example, through making music and producing high quality art

work for an exhibition. They enjoy the many cultural experiences the school offer them, such as visits to museums and theatre trips.

- Pupils learn about different faiths, cultures, beliefs, practices and ways of life. Teaching helps pupils develop tolerance and genuine respect for others' views.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Almost all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, make good progress in the academy. As a result, attainment is improving. Increasing numbers of pupils are reaching the higher levels in all subjects.
- The majority of children enter the Nursery and Reception with a level of development and skills that are below those typical for their age, especially in language and communication, their personal development, early reading and number. As a result of good teaching, children are well prepared for their learning in Key Stage 1; a greater proportion now leave the Early Years Foundation Stage with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful learners than when the academy first opened.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check (knowledge about letters and the sounds they make) was higher in 2014 than in the previous year, although it remained below the national average. As a result of teaching that is increasingly good, more pupils currently in the academy have the skills and knowledge to tackle unfamiliar words, and a greater proportion are working at the expected standard.
- In 2014, attainment at Key Stage 1 was broadly in line with the national average, but girls did better than boys. Actions taken to address boys' achievement are making a difference and their attainment in Key Stage 1 continues to improve.
- In 2014, Year 6 pupils achieved results that were broadly in line with the national average. This represents good progress from their starting points in the early years. Work in books and the academy's own data pupils currently in the academy are on track to gain higher results this year.
- Progress, by the time pupils leave the academy, is good overall. In 2014, most Year 6 pupils made at least the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics. A higher proportion than nationally made more rapid progress in reading and writing. The proportion that made above-expected progress in mathematics was similar to the national figure. Current information about pupils' achievement indicates that attainment and progress continue to be good.
- The achievement of the most-able pupils is often good. However, there is scope for them to achieve more, particularly in writing, because the level of challenge they receive in this subject is not always as high as it should be and they do not always write as much or as frequently as they could. However, in mathematics, a greater proportion of current Year 6 pupils are achieving the higher levels than in the past. In reading, almost all the most-able pupils reached the higher level 5 in 2014.
- In 2014, the overall attainment of disadvantaged pupils leaving Year 6 was higher than other pupils in the academy in reading, writing and mathematics but less than that of other pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils were around a term and a half behind pupils nationally in reading and mathematics and two and a half terms behind in writing. As a result of targeted action by all staff, led by the academy's 'Pupil Premium Champion', disadvantaged pupils currently in the academy now attain higher standards than other pupils in all three subjects and their attainment is rapidly improving.
- Compared to other Year 6 pupils nationally, a greater proportion of disadvantaged pupils made expected and above expected progress in both writing and mathematics in 2014. Disadvantaged pupils in the academy made similar progress to other pupils nationally in reading, with a greater proportion making rapid progress in this subject.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similarly good progress as other pupils

currently in the academy. The good progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs in mathematics last year is now evident in other subject areas.

The early years provision is good

- Children thrive in the Nursery and Reception classes. Many start the academy unable to communicate their wants and needs. They struggle to speak clearly, to name familiar objects or to say how they are feeling. They lack the confidence to talk to unfamiliar adults. Many children have difficulty in using equipment, such as crayons or scissors, correctly. The nurturing atmosphere and clearly established routines help children settle in quickly and start to grow in confidence.
- When they start, many children find it difficult to manage their feelings. They struggle to share or take turns. They find it hard to wait when they need adult attention. Adults continuously model good behaviour and talk with children about how to make good choices. As a result, children soon learn to play happily together and to be part of a community.
- Children are safe in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures and check the suitability of all adults who have contact with children. Children learn to identify risks and to play safely. For example, children told an inspector about how they have to be 'safety inspectors' to make sure the outdoor learning area is safe for them to use.
- Teachers work closely with parents to find out what children can and cannot do and to track their developing skills. Each term, the teacher meets with parents to discuss their children's progress and to agree the next big step they need to take. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together to check children's progress each day and plan learning experiences that meet their needs very well.
- Adults place great emphasis on helping children to communicate confidently. For example, all adults use a form of sign-language which helps children make sense of what adults are saying. Precisely targeted teaching helps children, who have particularly weak skills, to learn to say words more clearly and to use a larger variety of words when they speak. This helps children overcome the significant difficulties they have talking about themselves or what they are doing. Teachers are very effective in helping children to hear and use good spoken English.
- Teaching is usually exciting and dynamic. Teachers provide a good balance of experiences so that children spend quality time being taught directly by adults and have plenty of well-designed opportunities to investigate, explore and apply their growing skills. Just occasionally, when teachers are working with larger groups of children, or the whole class, they do not sufficiently adapt the activity to cater for all needs and abilities. For example, in a mathematics lesson, the teacher focused on using low numbers in a whole-class counting activity. Consequently, the most-able children were not challenged and made little progress.
- Phonics is taught well in the Nursery and Reception classes. Children learn to hear sounds in words and recognise letters in the Nursery. Children's work in the Reception class shows they learn to apply this knowledge in their early attempts at writing.
- As a result of the exceptional care and good teaching they receive, children develop self-confidence and willingness to learn. They overcome their communication difficulties and develop good learning habits, ready for when they enter Year 1. They build well on the very weak reading, writing and mathematics skills they have on entry. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development is rising year on year. While it was still low last year, inspection evidence indicates it will continue to improve over time. Children are well prepared for the learning they will encounter in Key Stage 1.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led. Rigorous tracking of data is used to accurately identify strengths and weaknesses in the provision. Team meeting notes show several examples of how provision has been modified to address emerging issues. For example, a weakness in children's progress in using technology was identified. Activity areas were adapted accordingly and children now use technology confidently to support their learning in other areas.

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	139014
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	447868

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Selvey
Principal	Joanne Hall
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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