

Merrill Academy

Brackens Lane, Alvaston, Derby DE24 0AN

Inspection dates 7–8 June 2016

Overall effectiveness **Inadequate**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders, including governors and the Derby College Academy Trust, have not been effective in securing the rapid improvements needed since the last inspection. In particular, they have not improved the quality of teaching, or pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Leaders do not have an accurate view of how well the school is doing. They are too optimistic in their judgements.
- The leadership and management of pupils' behaviour are weak. The school's behaviour policy is not applied consistently. As a result, some pupils get away with behaving badly.
- Hence, pupils' behaviour is poor. In lessons, too many pupils cannot get on with their learning because of the disruptive behaviour of others in the class.
- Too many pupils fail to attend school regularly. Leaders do not have an effective process in place to make sure that pupils, including pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and students in the sixth form attend school regularly enough.
- Outcomes for pupils are inadequate. Too many groups of pupils underachieve and are therefore poorly prepared for the next stage of education, employment or training. This includes the most able pupils who are insufficiently challenged and do not make the progress that they should.
- Not enough is done to make sure that pupils develop and practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills. This means that many pupils find it difficult to make progress because they do not have the literacy and numeracy skills that they need.
- Not all teachers ensure that pupils make good progress in lessons because they do not take pupils' starting points into account.
- Pupils do not receive useful feedback as to how their work can be improved or how essential corrections can be made.
- Leadership of the sixth form is poor. There is no head of sixth form in post. The quality of learning on the 16 to 19 study programmes is not good enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders take seriously the safety and welfare of pupils. Much successful work is done to promote pupils' personal development.
- Some strong leadership practice has been established in English and mathematics. Pupils' progress is beginning to improve.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently ensure that there is sufficient high-quality leadership capacity within the school to bring about the rapid and sustained improvements needed.
- Ensure that all pupils behave well in school by making sure that:
 - a well-understood behaviour policy is in place and that all staff consistently apply it
 - leaders develop a culture in school where all staff work together and make pupils' good behaviour everybody's business.
- Ensure that precise and pre-emptive strategies are put in place so that more pupils attend school regularly.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - the high proportion of pupils who enter school with attainment that is significantly below the national average are effectively supported to develop the literacy and numeracy skills they need to catch up
 - those most able pupils who have fallen behind their peers are challenged to make rapid progress
 - the progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is tracked precisely so that the correct support can be put in place to remedy any gaps in learning
 - the achievement gaps that exist between male and female pupils and disadvantaged pupils and others in the school continue to narrow
 - the underperformance of pupils in science is immediately addressed by improving the quality of teaching so that is consistently good.
- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that:
 - all teachers use the information about pupils' starting points to plan lessons that provide sufficient support and challenge for different groups of pupils
 - all teachers provide helpful marking and feedback to help pupils understand how to correct their mistakes and improve their work
 - opportunities are planned more often in all subjects to develop pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills
 - teachers are challenged and supported to tackle effectively the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils so that learning of others is not disrupted.
- Improve the quality of the 16 to 19 study programmes by making sure that:
 - effective leadership is in place to drive the rapid improvement that is required.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leaders have not been successful in driving up standards. There has been insufficient leadership capacity to drive the improvements needed at the pace required. Some leaders have left the school and their posts have not been filled. Others are new to the school and have had insufficient time to make the difference needed. Some leaders have been promoted and have not had the effective coaching and training which they require to carry out their roles successfully. The current headteacher, a talented subject leader promoted from within the school, has been in post since April 2016. The previous headteacher is now the executive headteacher for Derby College Education Trust.
- The leadership and management of pupils' behaviour and attendance are inadequate. The behaviour policy is not well understood or followed by staff. The sanctions in place for pupils who misbehave are ineffective and the number of pupils who are excluded from school is far too high. Too few pupils regularly attend school.
- The school's sponsor has not put in place adequate support to ensure that pupils' behaviour is well managed.
- The leadership of the sixth form is inadequate. There is no head of the sixth form in post. Elements of this role are shared by members of staff and the librarian. The executive headteacher oversees the provision as part of his other duties. A highly skilled governor provides additional support and guidance. This is no substitute for effective leadership, however.
- The impact of subject leaders in driving improvement is undermined by the school's poor systems to manage pupils' behaviour. Many of the subject leaders are new to post, including the subject leaders for English, mathematics and science. These subject leaders told inspectors that they had an ambition to deliver high-quality lessons so that pupils could achieve well. They said that they were prevented from leading this required change because they spent too much time managing the day-to-day poor behaviour of pupils within their subject areas.
- The curriculum has significant weaknesses in its promotion of pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills across subjects and at key stage 3 and key stage 4. The majority of pupils enter the school with a reading age much lower than their chronological age. Not enough support is given to these pupils, some of whom cannot read the instructions they are given by their teachers. As a result, these pupils do not make the progress they should.
- There is insufficient clarity about the way that the data about pupils' progress is used. There is a great deal of available information but this is not used consistently well by all subject leaders and classroom teachers.
- Evaluation of the school's use of additional funding is underdeveloped. The impact of the additional catch-up funding for pupils who arrive in Year 7 with low levels of literacy and numeracy is not tracked effectively. The majority of pupils within the school are disadvantaged. Leaders have in place a range of funded strategies to support these pupils and can show some evidence of impact; too many disadvantaged pupils underachieve, however. Too many pupils who enter the school with achievement at key stage 2 below national expectations do not catch up with their peers.
- Leaders work hard to promote a cohesive community. Pupils report that there is little disharmony between different groups and that their teachers work hard to encourage them to get on with other people and respect others' views.
- Leaders work effectively with outside agencies to ensure that pupils have an extensive range of opportunities to experience life in modern Britain. The 'Merrill challenge' provides opportunities for pupils to learn about leadership and to develop their communication skills and confidence. There is much effective work done to promote democracy, including through the involvement of a local member of parliament. Pupils are engaged in a range of challenges so that they gain access to, and learn from, the views, opinions and experiences of others.
- There is now a process in place to manage the performance of teachers. Leaders are held to account against the school's targets and line management arrangements have improved. Subject leaders told inspectors that they value the range of professional development opportunities provided.
- The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator is putting in place a number of strategies to address the underperformance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This leader has identified the right priorities; it is too soon to judge the impact of this work, however.
- The previous subject leaders of English and mathematics have been promoted to senior roles within the school. These two leaders have made a difference. They improved strategic leadership of their subjects and

improved results. One of these highly talented leaders is the current headteacher.

■ **The governance of the school**

- Governors have not done enough to ensure that leaders manage pupils' behaviour effectively, reduce the number of pupils who are excluded from school or improve pupils' attendance.
 - Governors have not been effective in holding school leaders to account. Leaders' self-evaluation is overly generous and key performance indicators lack crucial detail; for example, the number of disadvantaged pupils making more than the expected progress.
 - Governors have not ensured effective leadership of the sixth form. The link governor for this provision has excellent knowledge and provides valuable support but there is no sixth form leader in place
 - Governors have ensured that a system of performance management is in place.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Extensive work has been undertaken with outside agencies and the community to make sure that this is a cohesive school. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare and is dealt with promptly by their teachers. Pupils spoke confidently about the very many ways in which they are taught to keep themselves safe, including when using social media and the internet. A group of pupils spoke sensibly with inspectors about the risks linked to ways that young people could be exploited and how they would prevent this happening to themselves. Procedures for reporting concerns are well understood by pupils and by staff and records are diligently kept. Checks on the suitability of all staff and volunteers meet requirements. There is a strong safer-recruitment process in place. A sixth form student within the school has led a programme of training for other pupils on the risks associated with female genital mutilation. This training was described as 'inspirational' and has gained local and regional recognition.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- In many lessons, pupils are prevented from learning because of the disruptive behaviour of others in the class. Too often the classroom teacher has to stop the flow of the lesson to address this poor behaviour. In some instances poor behaviour is not managed effectively and chaos ensues.
- Not enough pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 make more than the expected progress and the most able pupils make less progress than others in the school. Teachers 'play safe' and do not habitually plan lessons where pupils can be challenged – in fear of the very real possibility that pupils will behave badly.
- Teachers do not routinely take pupils' starting points into consideration when planning lessons. This means that some pupils do not understand what to do, or they do not get the support they need to catch up. Expectations for some pupils are not high enough.
- The quality of teaching is too inconsistent in science. Too few pupils at key stage 3 and key stage 4 make the progress that they should as a result.
- The assessment policy is not consistently implemented by subject leaders and teachers. As a result, pupils are not routinely given the feedback that they need to correct any errors they make or improve their work. Inspectors saw evidence that the green feedback stickers were being used but that the information contained on these was often too vague to be helpful.
- A high proportion of pupils have a reading age below their chronological age. Inspectors saw little evidence that teachers' planning took this into consideration. Indeed, evidence was seen where pupils were unable to read the instructions provided by their teacher and as a result they did not complete the task.
- Teachers do not always expect enough of their pupils. Work in books is often incomplete and sometimes pupils have been allowed to produce work without care. This is particularly striking in the books of key stage 3 pupils.
- Appropriate support is beginning to be implemented to improve outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The 'student passport' is a useful strategy to ensure that teachers understand the particular needs of individuals and what is required to address these. Currently, there is insufficient monitoring to make sure that the passport is used consistently by all teachers and that pupils' needs are met.
- When pupils learn well it is because poor behaviour is managed effectively and the teacher uses their good subject knowledge to engage the interest of the pupils. Pupils were observed learning, being enthused and engaged in their physical education, history and food technology lessons. Pupils in Year 10 said that they appreciated the care and support they received in their English and mathematics lessons. There is good practice within the school and many teachers are skilled and keen to deliver high-quality lessons. But too often teachers are worn down by the endless disruption of pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- The personal development and welfare of pupils is being compromised because pupils' behaviour is badly managed. Inspectors observed too many occasions during breaktime and lunchtime where there was not enough staff supervision and where behaviour was poor. Pupils told inspectors that at times they were crushed or pushed and some said that this could be 'scary'.
- Leaders have implemented many ways in which the personal development and welfare of pupils is supported. Many pupils receive extensive guidance, support and care.
- Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare and that if it does occur their teachers respond promptly and effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- The vast majority of pupils are well behaved but the poor behaviour of a significant minority of pupils is not managed well and so impacts on the learning of others.
- The internal provision for pupils who misbehave is not effective. This resource does not help to improve pupils' behaviour or develop their ability to learn.
- Too many pupils are excluded from school. The vast majority of these pupils are excluded for repeated poor behaviour. A large proportion of pupils that are excluded are pupils who speak English as an additional language. The strategies that are in place to make sure that pupils want to learn and behave well do not work for these pupils.
- Too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school is high. Disadvantaged pupils do not attend as well as others. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also lower than others within the school.
- Some pupils dress smartly and follow the dress code for the school. Too many pupils, however, do not wear their uniform with pride. Some staff do not challenge pupils to wear their uniform properly.
- The process now in place to monitor lateness is working. Fewer pupils are late to school than before.
- The education welfare officer employed by the school is beginning to implement a range of strategies to sharpen the way that pupils' attendance is monitored so that poor attendance can be addressed.
- Pupils who receive some of their education elsewhere through alternative provision attend well and are making progress. The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision at Kingsmead and Derby Pride are well supported. There are close links between these providers and leaders within the school.
- Derby College provide a vocational course option for one day a week. This is proving to be effective for the pupils that attend. Improvement has been seen in their behaviour and attitudes to learning.

Outcomes for pupils are inadequate

- Pupils who join the school have attainment that is significantly below the national average. Many pupils arrive with gaps in their learning. Too little is done to ensure that these gaps are addressed, which means that the majority of pupils do not catch up quickly enough.
- At key stage 4, the school did not meet the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in 2014 and 2015 in English and mathematics.
- The progress made by pupils within school is too variable. The least able pupils do not make the rapid progress that they need to, because they are not given the support they need to address the gaps in their learning. The most able pupils do not make the same progress as other pupils within the school and are not sufficiently challenged in some of their lessons. Too few pupils make more than the expected progress, because teachers' expectations of what some pupils can achieve are too low.
- In key stage 4, the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school are closing in English and mathematics. At key stage 4 in English and mathematics a wider gap remains between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and all pupils nationally. Achievement gaps remain between male and female pupils. At key stage 3, too many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are underperforming.
- Pupils' achievement in science is poor. In 2015, the progress made by pupils at the end of key stage 4 was in the lowest ten per cent of all pupils nationally. School data suggests that more pupils will make the progress expected in 2016; however, the predicted figures remain low. Pupils underperform in science at key

stage 3, particularly the current Year 8.

- The tracking of key stage 3 pupils is under review. Currently, in key stage 3, there is not an effective process in place to track the progress made by those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This means that the progress of these pupils cannot be followed by leaders, and that appropriate support cannot be put in place or monitored to assess the impact on pupils' learning.
- Too many pupils lack the basic English and numeracy skills essential for their next steps in education, training or employment.
- School performance information indicates that in 2016, a greater proportion of the current Year 11 pupils will make better progress in both English and mathematics than in 2015.

16 to 19 study programmes are inadequate

- The leadership of the sixth form is inadequate. There is no head of sixth form in post. The previous headteacher is overseeing this provision in addition to his new role as executive headteacher for Derby College Academy Trust. Additional leadership roles have been shared with other staff members. Students told inspectors that there was not a sixth form leader and they thought this was 'disappointing'.
- The analysis and evaluation of sixth form data, including current data from students' starting points, is not effective. There is not a swift response to address the underperformance of pupils. An example of this is the way in which the underperformance of girls over time has not been evaluated or effectively tackled.
- The attendance of sixth form students is inadequate. Attendance within the sixth form is well below that of the other pupils within the school.
- In 2015, too many students failed to achieve as they should have, particularly, but not only, in the academic subjects offered. Consequently, standards in the sixth form were poor.
- School senior leaders and governors have taken the decision to phase out the delivery of academic subjects within the sixth form provision. The curriculum offered will be purely vocational. The school's own data suggests that students will achieve more positive results in vocational subjects in 2016.
- The school fulfils the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes by ensuring that lessons are provided for those pupils who did not achieve a grade C at GCSE in either English or mathematics. In 2014 and 2015 this provision had only limited success. Data for 2016 indicates that an increased number of pupils who re-sat their GCSE in English or mathematics will gain their qualification.
- Students told inspectors that the guidance they received about future learning, training or employment was too focused on progress towards university. In 2016, a more appropriate programme has been planned.
- While the Young Enterprise Scheme provides many positive experiences for students, it does not ensure that all students access work experience or work-related training.
- Students do not always progress to the correct next step in their learning. None of the Year 12 students who left Year 12 in 2015 having studied level 2 qualifications progressed to study at level 3.
- Students have positive attitudes to their studies. There is mutual respect between the students and their teachers.
- At times, the small number of pupils within the class inhibits the quality of discussion and debate.
- Students said that they feel safe within the sixth form and particularly well cared for by their tutors, about whom they speak highly.
- The link governor to the sixth form is highly experienced and knowledgeable.

School details

Unique reference number	139051
Local authority	Derby
Inspection number	10008509

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led school
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	770
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	94
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Heather Simcox
Principal	Marcus Shepherd
Telephone number	01332 576777
Website	www.merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 October 2014

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school is sponsored by Derby College Education Trust and opened in January 2013.
- Over 60% of pupils are supported by the pupil premium; this is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than that found nationally. Approximately half of pupils are from White British backgrounds, and half are from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average and increasing.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- Alternative curriculum opportunities in a range of vocational subjects are provided by Derby College. A small number of pupils attend alternative provision provided by Kingsmead pupil referral unit and Derby Pride Academy.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school does not meet the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 42 lessons; some of which were jointly observed with the headteacher and members of the leadership team.
- An inspector listened to pupils reading.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work of pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10 and students in Year 12.
- A range of meetings were held with the executive headteacher, headteacher, the chair of the governing body, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, a group of subject leaders and members of the Derby College Education Trust and governing body.
- Inspectors spoke with non-teaching staff and lunchtime supervisors.
- Inspectors spoke with four groups of pupils formally and other pupils informally in lessons, at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors considered correspondence from parents received during the inspection. There were too few responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, for these responses to be considered.
- Inspectors took into account 50 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation and development planning; governing body minutes; performance data for all year groups and records on behaviour, attendance, exclusions and pupils' welfare.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at break, lunchtime, between lessons and in lessons.
- Pupils were observed arriving to school and at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

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Christine Connearn	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Monk	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Sammy	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Watson	Ofsted Inspector

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