

Merchants' Academy

Gatehouse Avenue, Withywood, Bristol BS13 9AJ

Inspection dates

19–20 September 2017

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
Early years provision	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have allowed a culture of low expectations to permeate the school. Leaders and teachers accept standards that are far lower than pupils are capable of.
- Pupils cannot read and write as well as they could. This is holding them back throughout their time in the school. Standards in mathematics are low.
- The quality of teaching is poor. Leaders have not monitored the quality of teaching with sufficient rigour and they have allowed poor teaching to go unchecked. They have not made sure that teachers have the necessary skills to improve their teaching. Training has not been precisely targeted and, as a result, is ineffective.
- Pupils are absent from school far too often. Many pupils are absent for a day a week, on average. They make much slower progress as a result.
- Leaders have not made sure that systems are in place to track pupils' progress accurately. As a result, teachers do not have a clear view of what pupils understand and so they cannot guide pupils in the next steps of their learning.
- Children make poor progress in the early years. Leaders have not made sure that teaching is effective and that children get the right mix of learning experiences to allow them to progress.
- Students in the sixth form make slow progress. A-level results are poor because teaching is ineffective. Leaders have failed to address this over a long period.
- Governors have failed to hold senior leaders to account for the performance of the school over the last three years.
- Senior leaders have failed to make sure middle leaders and teachers are effective in their roles.

The school has the following strengths

- There have been significant recent improvements to leadership. Governance is now much improved and new senior leaders, including a new principal, are in post.
- Governors and leaders now have an accurate understanding of the school's weaknesses.
- The behaviour of pupils has improved recently as a result of leaders' insistence on higher expectations.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of 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?

- Raise standards of literacy and mathematics across all phases of the school.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
 - recent improvements to how senior and middle leaders and teachers are held to account are embedded across all parts of the school
 - assessment systems and practice enable teachers to accurately plan learning so that pupils achieve well and make good progress and guide them on how to improve
 - appropriate training is provided for teachers so that teaching improves rapidly
 - the key stage 4 curriculum meets the needs of all pupils.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment across all phases, including the sixth form, by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - assessing accurately what pupils know, understand and can do and so target work that moves pupils onto the next steps in their learning
 - ensuring that teachers plan work that challenges pupils to think deeply and solve complex problems.
- Improve personal development by ensuring that:
 - pupils are better supported to develop respect and tolerance for those of different races and faiths
 - pupils are better informed about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Improve attendance across all year groups so that pupils attend more regularly and the number who are persistently absent falls rapidly.
- Rapidly improve leadership and provision in the early years so that children, particularly the most able, make strong progress from their starting points.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Senior leaders have allowed a culture of low standards and low expectations to take a firm hold in the school. Standards, which were already low, have declined further in the past two years. This culture is apparent across early years, primary, secondary and the sixth form. As a consequence, teachers have accepted poor-quality work from pupils and slow rates of progress over a number of years.
- Leaders are failing to monitor the quality of teaching with sufficient rigour. They have allowed poor teaching to become the norm. Teachers have not been given the guidance necessary on how to improve and so they have continued to underperform.
- Leaders are failing to provide high-quality training for teachers so that they can improve their teaching and raise pupils' progress. Until recently, there has been a very high turnover of teachers. A significant number of new staff have not received the training they require to develop the quality of their teaching.
- Senior leaders recently introduced some new policies and clear expectations of teachers. However, these initiatives do not have a high enough profile and so fail to have an impact on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress. Teachers have not been given training on how to implement the policies and there is no effective monitoring to ensure that the policies lead to improvement.
- Senior leaders do not make their expectations of middle leaders sufficiently clear. They do not ensure that middle leaders monitor the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility effectively. As a consequence, middle leaders in both primary and secondary phases do not have a secure enough understanding of the performance of pupils or teachers. This has led to significant inconsistencies of approach and effectiveness between teachers.
- Leaders in the primary phase are not effective in raising standards in the early years, nor in Years 5 and 6. Leaders do not ensure that the quality of teaching in these areas is good enough. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Leaders provide extra support for pupils who make the slowest progress but this does not prevent large numbers of pupils falling behind. Leaders are more successful in key stage 1 and Years 3 and 4. Here, leaders are ensuring that expectations are higher and pupils make better progress.
- The secondary curriculum does not meet the needs of pupils. In key stage 4, pupils are offered a narrow range of option choices with very limited vocational opportunities. This has resulted in pupils taking GCSEs that they do not enjoy or are not relevant to them. The sixth-form curriculum fails to meet the needs of students. The choice of options is small and not suited to the school's pupils as they transfer from key stage 4.
- Leaders have failed to make sure that there is a clear and effective assessment structure that allows teachers, pupils and parents to understand the progress that pupils make. Consequently, teachers struggle to identify and address the next steps in pupils' learning. The learning they provide does not support and motivate pupils to learn effectively.
- Senior leaders are failing to protect pupils from the impact of very significant levels of

staff changes. As a result of staff turbulence, middle leaders are unable to make sure that all staff have the necessary skills and this is leading to pupils experiencing inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Many teachers feel leaders do not support them as they strive to improve the quality of teaching.

- The pupil premium funding is not spent effectively. Leaders have put a range of strategies in place to support disadvantaged pupils but these have not been successful. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils make very slow progress across virtually all year groups. The school also receives funding targeted at pupils who need to catch up with their classmates when they join Year 7. Leaders have not used this funding effectively. These pupils still have weaker reading and writing levels than other pupils.
- The additional funds that the school receives for pupils with an education, health and care plan have not resulted in improved outcomes for these pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make good progress because there is no effective system of monitoring progress and supporting pupils when they need help.
- Leaders do make effective use of the funding the school receives for primary physical education and sports. As a result of the funding, teachers receive additional training and more pupils are able to take part in physical activities.
- Weaknesses in leadership are deep and entrenched. However, a new principal and senior leadership team have just taken up post. They are supported by a new multi-academy trust and revitalised governance. This team has a clear understanding of the school's weaknesses and they have, in the short time they have had together, re-energised teachers to set about the improvements necessary.
- Until the recent reorganisation, the school had not made effective use of any external support. The school's new leaders are now seeking out support but it is too soon to be able to judge any impact.
- It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- Governors and trustees are now holding leaders to account for standards across the school. However, this has only begun to happen in the last year. Prior to that, governors allowed a period of decline to take place. They were ineffective in addressing the declining performance of the school with its leaders.
- Governors have a broad range of professional skills and they are now well trained to carry out their roles. They are working closely with the leader of the multi-academy trust and they are well informed about the school's performance. As a result, they are increasingly effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and staff work together well to make sure pupils are kept safe. Pupils feel safe and know who to go to should they have a concern. There is good support for pupils who are vulnerable and require additional help. The school engages well with external

agencies, such as the local authority. However, some parents feel that communication from the school is poor.

- The administration of all aspects of safeguarding is good. All the necessary checks prior to the recruitment of adults at the school are carried out diligently and staff training is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low across the whole school. Typically, the learning they provide does not challenge pupils to think deeply. Consequently, pupils do not make the gains in skills, knowledge and understanding that they otherwise should.
- The teaching of literacy is weak. Many pupils enter the secondary phase with weak skills and teachers are not effective in addressing the problem. The school policy on teaching literacy is applied inconsistently by teachers and so pupils make the same mistakes repeatedly.
- The assessment of pupils' progress is weak across most key stages. In the primary phase, teachers do not know exactly what pupils know, understand and can do. As a result, they do not plan work that helps them progress. Teachers typically set work that suits middle-ability pupils but the most able pupils are left unchallenged and those that require extra help cannot make progress.
- Assessment is also weak in key stage 3. The system to track pupils' progress is not effective. In English and mathematics, teachers are unable to plan their lessons effectively because they are unsure of exactly what pupils can do. As a consequence, pupils achieve less well than they should.
- Teachers do not consistently apply the school's policy on giving feedback to pupils. When teachers do provide feedback, it often lacks clarity and so pupils are unable to benefit from it. Sometimes, teachers give helpful and informative guidance to move pupils' understanding on. However, pupils often ignore it.
- Teachers do not give the most able pupils enough opportunities to extend their thinking to make good progress. Sometimes, the most able are given alternative activities designed to stretch them but these are often ineffective because they are not challenging enough. Where pupils are given work that does stimulate them, they respond well and are keen to accept the challenges offered. However, this happens too rarely to make a difference for these pupils.
- Where teaching is weak, it is often because teachers lack the knowledge and skills to set appropriate work to help pupils improve and support poor literacy. This is the result of a lack of effective training. The situation is made worse by repeated changes of teacher.
- Teaching in key stage 1 and Years 3 and 4 is increasingly effective. Pupils make progress in line with pupils in other schools as a result of higher expectations and a well-structured curriculum.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- The school's programme to support pupils' personal and social skills is not effective in providing the support pupils need. Many pupils have a low sense of self-esteem and they lack self-confidence. Pupils have only a limited understanding of how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy.
- Pupils say that bullying is generally dealt with well by teachers. Homophobic bullying is rare. However, some pupils show a lack of tolerance and understanding of race, faith and cultural differences. There is some racist bullying and pupils report that racist language is not uncommon.
- Pupils only have a limited understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. The school's work to address these issues is ineffective.
- Pupils are aware of the potential dangers of social media and know how to keep themselves safe online.
- The school offers a number of activities both during and outside the school day that enrich pupils' experience. In the secondary sector, pupils get opportunities to take part in numerous arts and sports activities. They can also join the Combined Cadet Force and take part in the Duke of Edinburgh award. Pupils speak highly of these opportunities.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- A significant minority of pupils have poor attitudes to learning. Leaders do not ensure that these pupils come to lessons prepared, with their work complete and up to date. This slows their progress. When teaching is not well targeted, pupils tend to become disengaged and are unwilling to answer the teachers' questions.
- Rates of absence are unacceptably high. There are far more pupils persistently absent than in other schools. Leaders are failing to stem the decline in attendance. They have only recently begun to stress the importance of attending school to pupils and parents. Leaders do not focus sufficiently on following up who is absent and why. This is adversely affecting the progress pupils make in their learning.
- The conduct of secondary pupils around the site is generally good. Pupils are polite and courteous to adults and friendly and pleasant to each other. Pupils say that behaviour has improved significantly recently as a result of a new 'ready to learn' policy. While they grumble about some aspects, they are grateful that disruption in lessons has been largely dealt with and they can focus on their work in a calm environment.
- Behaviour in the primary phase is not yet good. While most pupils behave well, there are instances when pupils are slow to react to teachers' instructions.
- A small number of pupils with behavioural and emotional challenges, who struggle to succeed in mainstream classes, attend an alternative provision on the school site.

Pupils are placed there temporarily while their needs are assessed. The success of the provision is mixed. Some pupils thrive, others fail to benefit.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils make almost universally poor progress, across the whole age range. In early years, children are not given the start they need. In key stage 2, pupils make significantly less progress than in other schools. In key stages 3 and 4, pupils make slower progress than in nine out of ten other schools. In the sixth form, students taking A levels make less progress than students in other schools.
- Children in the early years make slow progress, particularly with their communication, language and literacy skills. Boys make significantly slower progress than girls. Children are not getting the start they need because leaders and teachers do not set high enough expectations and do not structure learning activities sufficiently well.
- In the primary phase, at key stage 2, progress in reading, writing and mathematics is weak because teachers do not set high enough expectations. The work pupils are set does not challenge them and they are not given the guidance they need to make good progress. In key stage 1, pupils are making better progress. This is the result of recent improvements to the curriculum. Pupils also benefit from some good teaching. This success is now beginning to extend into Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils make very slow progress in key stages 3 and 4 and do not achieve the standards they are capable of in their GCSEs. They underperform significantly in all subjects. This is largely because leaders and teachers expect little from them. Consequently, pupils expect little from themselves and so, too often, they settle for second best.
- Sixth-form students do not achieve the A-level results of which they are capable. Their progress is not rigorously monitored and when they fall behind they are not able to catch up and make the progress that students in other schools do. A small number of students who take applied courses do make good progress.
- The most able pupils do not make good progress from their starting points. In the primary phase, few pupils achieve the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In the secondary phase, the most able make slower progress than other pupils in the school. This is because teachers do not set work which makes them think hard or challenge them to go beyond their comfort zone.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not able to make the progress they could. Teachers are provided with information about their needs but they do not use it to provide the extra support these pupils need effectively.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make very slow progress from their starting points. Pupil premium funding is not used effectively to help them to catch up with other pupils and they do not receive the extra help they need. In Years 3 and 4 disadvantaged pupils are starting to make better progress.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- Leadership of the early years provision is poor. Leaders do not have an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Actions taken by leaders to improve the early years provision have not been effective. Leaders have not ensured that teachers have a good understanding of the needs of each child as they transfer from the Nursery to Reception. As a result, teachers are unable to plan activities that stimulate children’s development.
- Children do not make good progress because the quality of teaching is weak. Often, children are not given activities that help them to develop their key skills. Consequently, they make slower progress than children in other schools. Children make particularly slow progress in developing their communication, language and literacy skills. They are not well prepared for transfer to Year 1.
- Staff do not plan activities that extend the understanding and learning of the most able children. As a result, they do not make good progress and achieve well, especially with their literacy and communication skills.
- Boys make slower progress than girls, particularly with their writing, because teachers do not make sure they are always fully engaged in their learning.
- Teaching is weak. This is because leaders do not ensure that teachers receive the training that they need to support and develop the learning of the school’s youngest children.
- Teaching assistants do not support children’s learning effectively. They too lack the necessary skills to ensure that children learn effectively and achieve their potential.
- Leaders ensure that children in the early years are safe. Staff have received appropriate training and implement the school’s safeguarding policies effectively.

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- Students make slow progress from their starting points and achieve significantly weaker A-level results than students in other schools. This has been the case for some time and shows no sign of improving. Students currently make less progress than the government’s minimum expected threshold.
- Leadership of the sixth form is weak. Leaders have overseen poor and declining outcomes for students over a three-year period. This is because they do not have high enough expectations of students and they do not monitor the progress students are making with sufficient rigour. The methods teachers use to monitor students’ progress are unreliable and so teachers cannot check effectively what students know and what they find difficult.
- Students do have opportunities for work experience and independent advice and guidance about their next steps but school leaders do not effectively track which students are taking up the opportunities offered.
- Nine out of ten students stay in education or go on to employment when they have completed their A levels. This is slightly higher than the national average and reflects good links with higher education providers, particularly with the University of Bristol, who co-sponsor the school.
- Until recently, leaders have not monitored attendance effectively and have had low

expectations of students' attendance. As a result, students are absent too often.

School details

Unique reference number	135597
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10039797

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,061
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	68
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Trevor Smallwood
Principal	Samantha Williamson
Telephone number	0117 3015000
Website	www.merchantsacademy.org
Email address	info@merchantsacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2014

Information about this school

- In 2016, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards for key stage 4, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11. It did meet the floor standards for key stage 2 but was deemed to be coasting.
- The school is a larger than average-sized school. It has pupils from 3 to 18.
- The school is part of the Venturers Trust, a multi-academy trust formed in September 2017 through the merger of CGS and Merchants' Academy Trust. The trust is sponsored by the Society of Merchant Venturers and the University of Bristol.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is significantly above the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. There are very few from minority ethnic groups and a very few speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils’ written work. Many of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including minutes of governors’ meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils’ progress, attendance and behaviour data, safeguarding documents and the school’s review of its own performance.
- Meetings were held with governors, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 21 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, a letter and discussions with parents. They also took account of responses to a staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Andrew Lovett, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Paul Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Harris	Ofsted Inspector
Martyn Groucutt	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bragg	Ofsted Inspector
Duncan Millard	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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