

Merrill Academy

Brackens Lane, Alvaston, Derby, Derbyshire DE24 0AN

Inspection dates

10–11 April 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Outcomes for pupils were weak in 2017, particularly for boys, disadvantaged students, and the most able.
- Pupils in Year 11, especially the most able, are still underachieving due to a legacy of poor teaching over time.
- Leaders do not effectively account for or manage well the extra funding intended for disadvantaged pupils or those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of their pupils and they question them ineffectively.
- The small sixth form requires improvement because the quality of teaching and outcomes is inconsistent.
- Some members of staff who teach reading are not appropriately qualified to do so. Where this is the case, it is taught poorly. Pupils' basic literacy standards are too low.
- The curriculum has not fully met the needs of pupils. This is being addressed.
- Until recently, the school has not had an effective method of assessing pupils' achievement at key stage 3.
- A minority of pupils regularly behave badly.
- Too many pupils are persistently absent. However, many of these are in-year admissions, taken in by Merrill Academy from other local schools.
- Pupils are not provided with enough opportunities to see and experience life outside their community.

The school has the following strengths

- This used to be a deeply inadequate school. While not yet good, it has improved in every respect since its last full inspection in June 2016.
- The headteacher and his devoted, hard-working staff are creating an aspirational ethos through which most pupils are becoming proud of their school and themselves.
- Pupils are now making better progress, particularly in Years 7 and 9.
- The leader with responsibility for teaching has been effective in improving this area. This has led to pupils achieving more. Most pupils take care when presenting their work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and thereby pupils' outcomes, particularly those of boys, the disadvantaged and the most able by:
 - providing more accurate information to all staff on pupils' achievement through the developing assessment system
 - using the school's best practice to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, including through more effective questioning
 - ensuring that all those who teach reading are appropriately trained to do so
 - ensuring that all staff rigorously focus on raising pupils' basic literacy standards.
- Improve the behaviour of the minority of pupils who present regular challenges, through ensuring that members of staff apply the school's code of conduct consistently.
- Increase the attendance of those pupils who are persistently absent by continuing to work closely with the individuals concerned.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management through more considered use of the funding intended for those pupils who are disadvantaged or who have SEN and/or disabilities, and then reviewing its impact.
- Improve pupils' personal development by providing more opportunities to see and experience life outside their community.

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

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders' management of the funding intended for pupils who are disadvantaged or who have SEN and/or disabilities has not been effective. It has not been properly accounted for, and the impact of the spending has not been adequately reviewed.
- Until recently, leaders' decision-making regarding some pupils at risk of exclusion has meant that these pupils have not had full access to the curriculum.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has correctly identified areas for improvement, including that there not being enough information available to help meet these pupils' needs. Action is being taken in this regard.
- Leaders have not yet secured good teaching, outcomes or behaviour. They have not ensured that pupils are sufficiently literate. However, this is slowly improving and much work is being carried out in this regard, including reinvigorating the library with plans for free-reading time.
- However, this is an improving school. The highly committed headteacher has inspired loyalty from his staff and pupils. There is a collective will to improve the life chances of the pupils of Merrill Academy. This is also shared by the newly constituted local governing body.
- Leaders have established an aspirational culture, where pupils are beginning to take pride in their school and themselves. The hard work of staff means that this school is no longer providing an inadequate standard of education. Pupils matter to the staff. One pupil summed up the general feeling of many pupils in saying, 'The staff here care for us like they are our parents.'
- Leaders, particularly the member of staff with responsibility for the quality of teaching, engage and motivate their colleagues. Teaching is improving.
- Middle leaders have worked effectively with pupil mentors to contribute to the school's culture of improvement. They feel that they are held to account effectively and they are increasingly holding others to account. Middle leaders have made a good contribution to improving the school.
- The school provides opportunities through the curriculum to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain by considering democracy and the rule of law. Pupils are able to offer their views and ideas on certain aspects of school life. However, opportunities for pupils to experience life in modern Britain beyond their immediate community are limited.
- Pupils appreciate their 'mentor time' when small numbers of pupils from different year groups come together at the end of the day, which provides opportunities for pupils to develop socially. This contributes to the feeling of a supportive community.
- The headteacher has embraced the cultural diversity of the school. He has learned some Romani phrases, much to the delight and amusement of those pupils who speak this as their first language.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and mathematics has had a positive effect on

many pupils, although its impact is inconsistent.

- The school's curriculum is at a point of transition. In the past, and to some extent currently, it has not adequately met the needs and interests of pupils. However, this has improved.
- Pupils appreciate the variety of stimulating and engaging activities provided, both through the enrichment aspect of the curriculum and through extra-curricular clubs. There is a wide range of sports on offer, including fishing, archery and trampolining, as well as other pastimes such as knitting and the movie club.
- Leaders have successfully implemented a programme of purposeful activity across Years 7 to 11 to inspire and progressively raise awareness about future careers and aspirations. All pupils have access to impartial careers advice. The effectiveness of this is tracked for a core group of vulnerable learners, including those at risk of not being in education, employment or training. However, it is not effectively tracked more widely, which means that leaders do not know how well it is working.
- The school has benefited from its recent membership of the trust. The trust has helped in a variety of aspects, including: helping to establish a new local governing body; developing a more effective approach to assessment at key stage 3; increasing the capacity of the school to improve the quality of teaching; and advising Year 11 pupils on their future options.

Governance of the school

- The board of trustees of the Northworthy Trust is responsible for the governance of the school. It took on this responsibility on 1 January 2018. Trustees worked quickly to establish governance arrangements at the school. They approved the constitution of a local governing body in March.
- A skills audit of local governors has been undertaken with a view to using the respective talents and experience of the individuals in the best interests of the school.
- The chair of the board of trustees is well informed about the challenges facing the school and has a good understanding of his role and responsibilities.
- Local governors interviewed understand their function. They understand that, although things have improved, there is some way to go until the school is providing a good standard of education. They are committed to upholding the aspirational ethos of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Checks are made to ensure that staff who are appointed to the academy undergo appropriate vetting procedures.
- The academy leaders foster a culture which places the well-being of pupils as a priority. Pupils, especially those who are vulnerable, are well known as individuals.
- Where academy staff have concerns about pupils, systems are in place to track and monitor attendance and performance in the full range of subjects.

- Currently, too few members of the leadership team have undertaken training to ensure that they understand best practice in recruiting staff.
- The systems for maintaining staff training records are in place but do not readily provide leaders with information about renewal and refresher dates.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Although the quality of teaching has improved substantially since the previous inspection, some teachers still do not expect enough from their pupils and do not ask enough challenging questions to promote deeper thinking.
- Until recently, there was no system in place to effectively assess pupils in key stage 3. Therefore, leaders and teachers did not have the requisite information to assist them in their work. This affected the quality of teaching. Much work has been done on this area, but it is still developing.
- A lack of effective planning results in time being wasted on too many occasions.
- The use of coaching has enabled teachers to improve their practice, particularly through collaborating with other members of staff.
- 'DIRT' lessons (dedicated improvement reflection time) provide opportunities for pupils to reflect and improve their learning. This is becoming effective and is increasingly so when teachers use the findings to further help pupils.
- The tracking of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is now in place. The SENCo monitors individual pupils and the impact of any additional support they receive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils are not yet confident about their own abilities to be successful learners. Although this is improving, a significant proportion still needs considerable support to learn well.
- Pupils are well supported by staff with regard to their physical and emotional well-being. They have access to a mentor and can, if needed, also gain the support of a counsellor in the school.
- The pupils who are most vulnerable to exclusion are supported effectively through a programme of teaching that is tailored to their needs. This takes account of challenges that they face as individuals and is successfully preventing some pupils from being excluded.
- Pupils are taught to stay safe through a structured programme of teaching and visitors.

This includes raising pupils' awareness of how to stay safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' conduct, although improving, is inconsistent. In some lessons, pupils behave exceptionally well, and this leads to rapid learning. However, on too many occasions, pupils do not apply themselves well and the pace of learning is slow.
- The school is a much calmer and more orderly environment than in the past. Pupils reported positively that the changes introduced by the current headteacher have made a big difference to the behaviour in and around the school.
- The school provides a discrete setting of internal support for those pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour or who have other issues which make it difficult for them to prosper on a full-time basis in the main school. This has been mainly successful in helping pupils remain in school for their education.
- Levels of fixed-term exclusions, although higher than those seen nationally, have significantly reduced in the past year.
- The school has permanently excluded more pupils in the past year than has been the case previously. Higher expectations of pupils from staff are largely responsible for this.
- The school's work to increase attendance has resulted in some improvements. Systems are in place to respond quickly to absence, and support staff know pupils and their families well. The school minibus is used to collect pupils on a daily basis if they are persistently absent. Despite these efforts, rates of attendance are below those seen nationally. A major contributory factor is the number of pupils that Merrill Academy has to take in when, for whatever reason, pupils leave local schools. At the time of the inspection, the school had a very substantial number of in-year admissions – 87. This is almost 12% of the entire pupil roll. Thirty-five of these pupils were persistent absentees when they joined the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes for pupils were weak in 2017 and only just met the government's minimum expectation. They were particularly weak for boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able and for all pupils in most of their optional subjects.
- They remain weak for current Year 11 pupils, especially those who are most able. Over the years, these pupils have had a bad deal at Merrill Academy and have been let down in their education.
- Over the past year, progress has improved across year groups, particularly for those pupils in Years 7 and 9. Disadvantaged pupils are, on the whole, beginning to achieve more. Evidence in pupils' books – particularly in science, mathematics, history, geography and English – supports this judgement.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making similar levels of progress to those

of other pupils in most year groups.

- The Year 7 catch-up funding is having a positive impact on some pupils' reading and mathematics skills, although this is not consistent. Those pupils in Year 7 identified as needing additional support are making progress in a special 'Boost' class. Work to improve their reading is not as effective as it could be because staff have not received the appropriate training.
- A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision. Their academic progress is well tracked and is at similar rates to that made by pupils in the main school.
- Although pupils have underachieved in recent years, the school has successfully supported them in finding appropriate routes into their next stage of education.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form requires improvement because it is inconsistent. Although the subject knowledge of teachers is secure, expectations are too variable. Students are not consistently challenged so that they become confident in understanding how to make good progress. As a result, the progress of current students over time is also too variable.
- Although attendance has improved since the last inspection, it remains too low in Year 12.
- Outcomes for students in 2017 were broadly average. The school's own information on the performance of current students in Year 12 indicates a weaker picture for applied courses. This is because of changes made to the curriculum offer and because of the variability in the quality of teaching.
- The performance of students who had not secured a standard pass or better in English and mathematics by the end of key stage 4 is weak. Outcomes in 2017 and for current students is stronger in English than in mathematics, which has declined. However, both subjects require further improvement.
- The proportion of students who complete their courses is lower than the national average. However, students are well supported in moving to alternative placements. This is partly due to recent changes in the curriculum offer, which has resulted in greater student movement than leaders expected.
- Leaders have not ensured that all students take part in meaningful work experience. Although this is well promoted by leaders, leading to some good placements, a high proportion of students do not benefit from these experiences.
- The leadership of the sixth form has strengthened since the last inspection. Programmes of study meet requirements. Leaders have an accurate view of the effectiveness of the sixth form. They understand the areas in need of further improvement, and are taking effective action to tackle these, for example in raising expectations.
- The school provides good careers information, support and advice for students about their next steps. Students receive weekly guidance sessions that develop their

understanding about future opportunities. The proportion of students who move on to further education, employment and training is higher than the national average.

- Students receive good pastoral support. Relationships between staff and students are very positive. Students said that they value the 'family atmosphere' that the pastoral care generates.
- The range of non-qualification activities has widened since the last inspection. Students are rightly proud of their involvement in leadership opportunities. These include participation in the National Citizenship Service and the Young Interpreters scheme and acting as peer mentors for younger pupils in the school.
- Students' conduct and behaviour are good. They are polite, courteous and helpful.
- Students are very positive about the provision in the sixth form and the experiences they have gained from being part of the school's community. They said that they are proud to be members of the sixth form.

School details

Unique reference number	139051
Local authority	Derby
Inspection number	10026591

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	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	753
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	32
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Tim Gallimore
Headteacher	Marcus Shepherd
Telephone number	01332 576777
Website	www.merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 June 2016

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website. This is because, at the time of the inspection, there was no discrete, live website for the school. The website was in development.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish for the reason cited above.
- The school became part of the Northworthy Trust in January 2018.
- The appropriate authority for this school is the trust's board of trustees. It delegates

some functions to a local governing body.

- A very small number of pupils are educated at Derby Pride Academy.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 26 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders, three mentor sessions, and an assembly.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, two newly qualified teachers and other members of staff.
- The lead inspector spoke separately with two members of the trust, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and a sample of their books.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour before school, during lessons, around school, at breaktime and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in discussion groups and informally around the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plans, information about the attainment and progress of all pupils and records relating to behaviour and safeguarding.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, to take into account.

Inspection team

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