

Merrill Academy

Brackens Lane, Alvaston, Derby, Derbyshire DE24 0AN

Inspection dates

9–10 April 2019

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. Some pupils do not feel safe.
- Trustees have not acted with appropriate urgency to fulfil their responsibilities and address widespread weaknesses.
- Leaders do not have a clear vision for the school. They do not demonstrate the capacity to bring about the pressing improvements needed.
- Leaders and trust officers have an over-generous view of the school's effectiveness.
- Middle leaders are not supported and guided to fulfil their leadership roles and responsibilities.
- Pupils' outcomes are inadequate. At the end of Year 11 in 2018, pupils underachieved significantly in English, modern foreign languages and humanities subjects.
- The progress made by the most able pupils and the middle-ability pupils is significantly below average.
- Assessment information is unreliable.
- Leaders do not have effective strategies for the use of additional funding. Disadvantaged pupils underachieve considerably.
- The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not well met. They do not make satisfactory progress.
- Teaching is inadequate. Many teachers have low expectations of pupils' learning and do not manage behaviour effectively. Most teaching does not meet the needs of pupils.
- Overall, pupils' behaviour and conduct are inadequate. The number of exclusions has increased since the last school year. Some behaviour is wilfully disruptive, disrespectful and unsafe.
- Persistent absence is high and has increased this year. The absence of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND is particularly high.
- The 16 to 19 study programme does not enable students to make sound progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The planned curriculum is suitably broad. However, it is not delivered effectively as staff have low expectations of pupils.
- Careers advice and guidance are strengths. Older pupils speak positively about their preparation for the world of work.

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?

- Rapidly improve the school's procedures to keep pupils safe, by leaders and those responsible for governance:
 - creating a secure and effective culture of safeguarding that permeates all aspects of the school
 - eradicating the incidence of bullying, discrimination and unsafe behaviour
 - ensuring that all statutory checks are undertaken for all members of the governing body and school leaders
 - building capacity within the safeguarding team to effectively manage safeguarding concerns
 - maintaining robust and accurate records of actions taken to address safeguarding concerns
 - establishing rigorous systems to monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding processes and procedures to ensure that ongoing weaknesses are identified and addressed promptly
 - maintaining accurate records of pupils' attendance
 - ensuring that pupils fully understand safeguarding risks and how to avoid them, including those related to radicalisation and extremism.
- Improve urgently the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - trustees, governors and leaders create a powerful strategic vision for school improvement that will drive change and rapidly improve all aspects of the school and outcomes for pupils
 - trustees establish and sustain leadership capacity, including local governance, to bring about significant improvements in the quality of education
 - members of the board of trustees and governors fulfil their roles and responsibilities, including their statutory duties.
- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and thereby the attainment and progress of pupils, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils and insist on positive attitudes to learning
 - teaching is better planned to bring about gains in knowledge, deepen understanding and develop skills

- teaching meets the needs of different groups of pupils
 - teachers assess accurately and use this information to plan learning that addresses gaps in learning and challenges pupils to deeper learning
 - pupils understand what they are learning and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils, by ensuring that:
- leaders urgently review the school’s approach to behaviour management and raise behavioural expectations for pupils
 - leaders enable staff to challenge and manage poor behaviour proactively, swiftly and effectively so that it does not disrupt learning
 - pupils show respect, refraining from swearing and from using offensive language
 - pupils understand the negative effects of bullying and discriminatory behaviour
 - pupils are confident that staff will listen to them and take their concerns seriously
 - teachers improve pupils’ attitudes to learning
 - pupils’ attendance improves, and persistent absence is reduced.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Members of the board of trustees, governors and senior leaders have not established a secure and effective culture of safeguarding.
- Recent changes in senior leadership have led to instability. This has resulted in a continued fall in effectiveness in many aspects of the school. Leaders do not demonstrate the capacity to bring about the urgent changes required to secure good teaching and an acceptable standard of education.
- The school's self-evaluation is not accurate and does not reflect the current leadership structure. Leaders underestimate many endemic weaknesses that are plain to see.
- The school's development planning is ineffective. It is not bringing about the required changes to improve provision and outcomes.
- Leaders have changed the school's behaviour management procedures twice since the start of this school year. These changes have served to confuse the behavioural expectations of pupils and staff. As a result, the behaviour and conduct of pupils have deteriorated.
- Leaders' actions have been ineffective in improving pupils' attendance. This has resulted in increased proportions of pupils being regularly absent.
- The information that leaders hold on pupils' achievements is unreliable. This means that teachers' planning fails to build on what pupils already know. It also means that leaders are unable to monitor pupils' progress accurately. As a result, pupils do not receive appropriate support and challenge to improve their learning.
- Leaders have recently changed the curriculum, which is mostly broad and balanced. It provides opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. However, not all pupils have access to the planned curriculum as they follow part-time timetables.
- Senior leaders have failed to provide strategic direction, challenge and support to middle leaders. Consequently, middle leaders are unable to fulfil their leadership and management responsibilities effectively.
- The work of staff to promote British values is ineffective. The behaviour of some pupils is offensive and discriminatory. This undermines the school's values, which include excellence, determination, empathy and community. The culture of the school limits the development of respect and tolerance.
- Senior leaders do not use additional funding effectively. There are no coherent strategies in place to use the pupil premium funding, the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding or special educational needs funding. Leaders do not evaluate the impact of this funding. Disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and Year 7 pupils who need support with literacy and numeracy make weak progress.
- The local governing body does not monitor the use of additional funding. Governors are not able to say how the funds are used and whether they are used to good effect.

- Leaders' plans to support those pupils with SEND are improving. Sound leadership of SEND is in its early stages. However, it is not yet successful in enabling pupils with SEND to make strong academic progress.
- It is recommended that the school does not employ newly qualified teachers because pupils' behaviour is inadequate.

Governance of the school

- Members of the board of trustees have not been proactive and timely in providing strategic direction to address significant weaknesses. Trustees and trust officers are not providing the support needed to bring about necessary changes. They are not effective in challenging and holding leaders to account.
- The trust established a new local governing body in the spring term of 2018. Members of the local governing body have not been supported by the trust to understand their roles and responsibilities. As a result, the local governing body is largely ineffective in its role. However, members of the local governing body are dedicated and committed to wanting to make a difference in the school and local community.
- The trust and the local governing body have an over-generous view of the school. Trustees and governors are not sufficiently involved in the school's self-evaluation, and they do not monitor the school's development against the improvement plan. The trust is culpable in its ineffectiveness as a responsible authority.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. Trustees have not ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose.
- Some pupils do not feel safe in school. This is because leaders and staff do not deal effectively with the poor behaviour of other pupils. Over a third of parents and carers who responded to Parent View do not consider their children to be safe in school.
- Staff are not vigilant in ensuring that they know where all pupils are. Attendance registers are inaccurate and some pupils truant from their lessons. Leaders have not considered the safeguarding risks involved for those pupils who attend on a part-time basis. This accounts for approximately 10% of the school's roll.
- The checks on the suitability of members of the governing body, and leaders, to manage the school have not been completed. There are, however, records of appropriate recruitment checks having been completed for other staff.
- Senior leaders do not adequately support the safeguarding team. The team is over-stretched, with a large number of pupils to consider. As a result, safeguarding records are not as well organised and complete as they should be.
- Members of the safeguarding team know pupils well and are committed to their care and well-being. They work well with external agencies to gain additional support for pupils when needed.

- Staff receive annual safeguarding training and updates. They understand their responsibilities. They also know the systems they should follow if they have concerns or worries about a pupil or have concerns regarding a member of staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching is inadequate because too many groups of pupils make poor progress. The progress of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, and the middle-ability and most-able pupils is especially poor.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. They do not plan work that closely matches pupils' learning needs. This has a negative impact on the progress pupils make.
- Teachers do not use information about what pupils are able to do to plan the next steps in their learning. This is because the in-school information that teachers receive is often inaccurate and unreliable. As a result, pupils are not taught well and are not challenged to deepen their learning.
- Teachers have low expectations of pupils' behaviour. There are too many occasions when teachers accept or ignore pupils' poor attitudes, behaviour and conduct. This frequently hinders learning and restricts the progress that pupils make.
- The quality of questioning is often ineffective. There are many times when teachers do not address pupils' misconceptions and errors. Teachers do not consistently give pupils enough guidance about how to improve their work. Where advice is given, pupils rarely respond.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities to develop their literacy skills. Opportunities to develop reading and extend vocabulary are limited, especially in key stage 3.
- The teaching of pupils with SEND is weak. Teachers do not use information about these pupils when planning lessons. As a result, progress for these pupils is poor.
- As a result of poor teaching, pupils are not well prepared for their GCSE examinations at the end of key stage 4. Because too many pupils underachieve, they are not well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.
- A small minority of pupils have a genuine interest in their learning. Very few of these pupils show this interest in lessons because teachers fail to manage the behaviour of those pupils who wilfully disrupt lessons.
- In a minority of lessons, learning is more effective. In physical education, for example, teachers use good subject knowledge and build positive relationships with pupils. As a result, pupils make strong progress in this subject.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.

- Some pupils do not feel safe in school. The school's own survey of pupils' views indicates that more bullying occurs than is reported to members of staff. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that teachers do not always deal with bullying effectively.
- There are too many occasions when derogatory language and swearing from pupils are used to make fun of and insult other pupils. This undermines pupils' well-being.
- Pupils understand how to deal with some risks they might face related to online safety. They also understand the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse. They are less confident when speaking about the 'Prevent' duty and how to deal with different types of radicalisation.
- Careers guidance is a strength of the school's provision. Pupils receive many opportunities to consider their future options and develop their employability skills.
- The school uses various alternative provisions. Pupils in these provisions are kept safe and their attendance, attitudes and behaviour are reported to Merrill Academy staff regularly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate. A significant number of pupils show a lack of respect. Throughout the inspection, inspectors observed poor and unsafe conduct. This including swearing and offensive language, disrespectful attitudes, lack of respect for staff, refusals to cooperate, and blatant defiance. Some pupils routinely challenged staff.
- The behaviour of pupils in lessons is generally poor. Pupils' attitudes to learning are not as good as they should be. This is because teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are too low. Policies and routines are not used consistently to bring about significant improvements in pupils' conduct and behaviour.
- Uncooperative behaviour is not consistently addressed by staff and in many instances such behaviour is not challenged at all. Frequently, some older pupils were seen to be 'sleeping' in lessons with their heads in their arms on tables. Such behaviour goes unchallenged by staff.
- Low-level disruption is commonplace in lessons. Pupils who spoke with inspectors say that most of their learning is disturbed by poor behaviour. Their views are supported by inspection evidence, school behaviour logs and parents' views.
- The number of permanent exclusions and fixed-term exclusions has increased considerably this last year. Exclusion rates are well above national averages. A high proportion of boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are excluded.
- Overall attendance is declining and is below the national average. The attendance of older pupils is markedly lower than that of younger pupils.
- Persistent absenteeism is also increasing. A quarter of all pupils do not attend regularly. A high proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND do not attend regularly enough.
- Leaders acknowledge that attendance registers are inaccurate, and rates of attendance may be even lower than their information indicates. Poor attendance rates are

compounded with almost 10% of the school's roll attending school on a part-time basis.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils' underachievement has been prevalent in a wide range of subjects. Pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations is declining.
- In 2018, pupils' progress by the end of Year 11 in English, modern foreign languages and humanity subjects was in the bottom 10% of schools nationally. Progress in mathematics and science was also poor. Progress measures across most subjects were low and have declined from 2017.
- The proportions of pupils leaving the school with standard passes in English and mathematics were well below national averages in 2018.
- Disadvantaged pupils, who make up almost two thirds of the school's cohort, did not make as much progress as their peers in school or other pupils from similar starting points nationally.
- Overall, pupils currently in Year 11 are making poor progress from their starting points. Progress in English is very low. The overall progress of current Year 10 pupils is even lower in most subjects. This reflects a legacy of underachievement that is not being addressed.
- Leaders have not ensured that there is accurate assessment information for pupils in key stage 3. They are currently working towards establishing accurate assessments in English, mathematics and science. However, this information is not analysed to determine pupils' achievements. Assessment information provided to inspectors about pupils in key stage 3 is as unreliable as it was for the last academic year.
- Inspection evidence suggests that current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, underachieve in several subjects and year groups. There is little sign of improvement.
- Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are not developed well enough in Years 7 and 8. This is because the Year 7 catch-up funding is not used effectively.
- Pupils with SEND do not make enough progress. However, pupils who speak English as an additional language make better progress than their peers.
- Recent improvements in careers guidance mean that most pupils go on to employment, education or training. However, they do not always have access to the most suitable courses because they have underachieved significantly in their GCSE examinations.

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- Leadership of the sixth form is inadequate. Leaders do not monitor accurately students' attendance and progress.

- The curriculum offer is very narrow, with one pathway to accommodate a very small number of students. Despite including opportunities to develop English and mathematical skills, the curriculum provides insufficient challenge.
- Work in students' books reflects low expectations. As a result, learning and progress are poor.
- Leaders have provided limited opportunities for work-related learning within the school. Not all students benefit from this experience.
- Leaders do not ensure that there are effective ways of monitoring when sixth-form students are on site. Students' attendance is low, and punctuality is poor. Safeguarding is not effective.
- Support for students' personal development and welfare is not thorough and complete. For example, students do not recall learning about extremism and radicalisation.
- Students who met with inspectors said they value the careers advice and guidance they receive. Many are confident in moving on to training or further education. However, leaders do not monitor students' applications for post-18 destinations.

School details

Unique reference number	139051
Local authority	Derby
Inspection number	10101574

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 comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	747
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	9
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Tim Gallimore
Acting Headteacher	Paul Beedle
Telephone number	01332 576777
Website	www.merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 April 2018

Information about this school

- Merrill Academy is part of The Northworthy Trust. The board of trustees is the appropriate authority. Members of the local governing body aim to fulfil responsibilities delegated by the board of trustees.
- The school is slightly larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through pupil premium funding is well above the national average.
- The school intends to close its sixth-form provision at the end of this academic year.

- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average. The percentage of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- The school uses several alternative providers for some of its pupils. These include Derby Pride Academy, The Island Project and The Kingsmead School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 59 lessons or parts of lessons and an assembly. Senior leaders carried out some observations jointly with inspectors. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in books and sampled books in classes.
- Inspectors listened to a sample of pupils in Years 7 and 8 read.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, leaders of subjects, heads of year, other leaders and members of staff. They spoke with different groups of pupils.
- The lead inspector met three trustees, including the chair of the board of trustees. He also spoke with three members of the local governing body, including the chair.
- Inspectors met with the trust's chief executive officer and other trust officers.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils around the school. In addition, they evaluated the 21 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as 10 free-text responses.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised several documents, including the school's self-evaluation, and minutes of meetings of the local governing body and board of trustees. They reviewed improvement plans and information on pupils' recent attainment and progress.
- Inspectors also considered behaviour and attendance information, and policies and procedures relating to: special educational needs; pupil premium funding; Year 7 catch-up funding; safeguarding; and child protection.
- The inspection was carried out following a number of complaints made to Ofsted that raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether safeguarding practices were effective.

Inspection team

Chris Davies, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Julie Sheppard	Ofsted Inspector
Janis Warren	Ofsted Inspector
Ellenor Beighton	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Hollis-Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel Tordoff	Her Majesty's 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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