

Inspection of Mercia Academy

Sunnyside, Newhall, Swadlincote, Derbyshire DE11 0TL

Inspection dates:	1 and 2 July 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The principal of this school is Jackie Cooper. This school is part of Lionheart Educational Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Kath Kelly, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Byron Chatburn. There is also an executive headteacher, Sally Wicken, who is responsible for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has been through a challenging period of change and upheaval in recent years, following the closure of the school building in November 2023. At the time of this inspection pupils were being taught in purpose-built temporary accommodation. Nevertheless, through the highly effective support provided by the trust, the school is making sure that pupils now have a better experience of school life. The quality of education provided by the school has improved. However, the curriculum is not delivered consistently well. As a result, pupils do not progress through the curriculum as well as they should.

The school has raised its expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct. Pupils understand these expectations. Most pupils behave well. They appreciate being rewarded and recognised for meeting the school's expectations. They feel safe in school and know they have an adult they can talk to if needed. There are respectful relationships between staff and pupils. Most pupils are polite and respectful.

The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and interests. For example, pupils enjoy attending performing arts clubs, as well as clubs for football, badminton and board games. Many pupils in key stage 4 enjoy taking part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's curriculum is well organised and ambitious. It sets out what pupils will learn and when. Most teachers have secure subject knowledge and understand how the curriculum should be delivered. However, there are inconsistencies in how well new learning is explained. Occasionally, new topics are not presented clearly. Additionally, checks on pupils' learning are not careful enough. This means that key gaps in pupils' knowledge and misconceptions are not consistently identified or addressed. As a result, sometimes pupils do not learn as well as they should.

The school prioritises reading. Teachers regularly read to pupils during registration sessions. The school quickly identifies pupils who require extra support to develop their reading skills. These pupils then receive well-thought-out help, which helps to improve their reading fluency.

The school accurately identifies the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers receive helpful information about how to meet the needs of these pupils. They are starting to use this information well to ensure that pupils with SEND access the curriculum fully. However, teaching does not always support pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to produce high-quality work. For example, some pupils make basic errors with punctuation and grammar or do not complete their work in enough detail. Teaching does not address these issues consistently well. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Most pupils have a positive attitude towards their learning. At break and lunchtimes, most pupils socialise well together. The school has made significant efforts to improve pupils' attendance. It carefully tracks pupils' absence and works with pupils and their families to identify any barriers to regular attendance. The school has provided effective support for pupils who need to improve their attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance has improved significantly in a short space of time. Despite this, attendance of some pupils is low. The school is aware of this and continues to support these pupils and their families.

The school has developed an effective programme for pupils' broader development. Pupils learn how to stay safe online. They also learn about healthy relationships, finance and different religions. Pupils are developing a secure understanding of fundamental British values and equality. They know to treat others, regardless of how different they are, with respect. Pupils receive effective careers advice and guidance. They are well prepared for their next steps.

The trust has provided effective support to the school, enabling it to improve in all areas. The school has an accurate view of what still needs to improve. Staff are proud to work here. They are well supported by school leaders. Staff receive regular professional development. This is helping them deliver the curriculum increasingly effectively. Those responsible for governance provide effective support and challenge.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are inconsistencies in how the curriculum is delivered. Sometimes, new topics are not explained clearly. Furthermore, checks on pupils' learning are not completed consistently well. This means that gaps in pupils' learning and misconceptions are not identified or addressed effectively. Consequently, pupils do not learn as well as they should. The school should ensure that teachers explain new learning clearly. It should also ensure that teachers check pupils' understanding well so that gaps in learning and misconceptions can be identified and resolved.
- Teaching does not always help pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in producing high-quality work. Some pupils make basic errors with punctuation and grammar. Furthermore, some do not complete work in sufficient detail. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should. The school should ensure that teachers support pupils to write accurately and produce high-quality work in all subjects.
- The attendance of some pupils is too low. As a result, they miss out on learning. The school should continue to embed effective approaches and processes for securing good attendance, to ensure that improvements are sustained.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	149380
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10379614
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	590
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Byron Chatburn
CEO of the trust	Kath Kelly
Principal	Jackie Cooper
Website	www.merciaacademy.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined Lionheart Educational Trust in June 2024.
- The school uses one unregistered and three registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also met with the CEO of the trust and other trust leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing board and a trustee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, English and art. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum and visited lessons in some other subjects.
- Inspectors visited registration sessions.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from a range of year groups, including pupils with SEND. Inspectors spoke with pupils at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes.

Inspection team

Paul Halcro, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gill Martin

Ofsted Inspector

Jo Ward

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025