

# Merchants' Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	135597
<b>Local Authority</b>	N/A
<b>Inspection number</b>	364409
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Lorna Brackstone HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	751
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	88
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Denis Burn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Anne Burrell (Principal)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 June 2010
<b>School address</b>	Gatehouse Avenue Bristol BS13 9AJ
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<b>Fax number</b>	0117 301 5002
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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors who visited 32 teachers in 32 lessons or part sessions. They held meetings with the Principal, members of the academy leadership team and middle leaders. Inspectors spoke to students in most year groups. The lead inspector met the Chair of the Governing Body and other members of the governing body. An inspector also met a group of parents and carers. Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised a range of documentation. This included the academy's improvement plans, key tracking information on student progress, reports written by the School Improvement Partner and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors analysed 107 inspection questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 250 students and 52 members of staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively the academy is closing the gap between the attainment of those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other groups.
- The attainment and progress of Year 9 students.
- Student attendance rates.

## Information about the school

Merchants' Academy is a smaller than average secondary school which mainly serves the south of the city. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. Although the student profile is changing rapidly, currently one third of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In some year groups half of the students have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of students with statements for special educational needs is twice the national average. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and there are very few students who use English as an additional language. A monitoring visit last June judged the academy to be making good progress toward raising attainment. At the start of this current academic year a new Principal took up post. The academy has a specialist status for Enterprise and Skills and is co-sponsored by the Society of Merchant Venturers and the University of Bristol. The students in Years 7, 8 and 9 started their secondary education at the academy.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

Merchants' Academy is a good school where all students achieve well. It is improving at a fast pace and has a good capacity to sustain this. The highly effective sponsors are successfully fulfilling their ambition to provide a secondary school in south Bristol where employable students leave with high aspirations for their future. Most students enter the academy with knowledge and skills that are well below expected levels. All students are making good progress in their learning and higher attaining groups make outstanding progress. Overall outcomes are good because all resources, including personal expertise and available finances, are used well and deployed efficiently to make the best impact on improving student experiences.

The inspirational work of the Principal and other senior leaders ensures that high aspirations for the students form part of the inclusive ethos of the academy. Rigorous monitoring and perceptive self-evaluation is driving the academy forward effectively. The re-structured middle leaders are starting to develop their role in raising standards and accelerating the rate of students' progress. Exemplary work in the care, guidance and support of every student particularly helps to remove barriers to learning and ensure that vulnerable students are given every possible chance to succeed. Safeguarding procedures are good and any anti-social incidents are dealt with promptly. Students have a good understanding of moral issues and reflect on the considerable improvements in behaviour by explaining that they can now 'learn without fear or disruptions'. Significant features of the academy's good provision are the interesting curriculum on offer and the positive relationships enjoyed between students and the teaching staff. As one parent explained, 'The teachers are very good at praising good work and behaviour and this makes for a positive learning experience.' Inspectors agree that while teachers encourage the students well, there is not a consistent approach to the marking of books.

The sixth form has a strong focus on improving student outcomes and raising aspirations. Provision has successfully built on its vocational strengths and developed new academic routes which provide students with a breadth of experience. However, attendance levels and retention rates indicate that the academic routes may be less popular and provision needs careful analysis. Recent changes in the leadership of the sixth form have yet to impact on its overall effectiveness but the capacity to make improvements in the sixth form is secure.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed the role of the middle leaders by:
  - increasing their responsibility and accountability for raising attainment, improving progress and driving ongoing improvements.
- Improve the overall effectiveness of the sixth form by:
  - evaluating the suitability of the more academic curriculum route
  - improving the level of attendance and retention rates
  - embedding the new leadership team.
- Ensure that, throughout the school, the quality of marking is consistent and students are always clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Although standards at the end of Year 11 have been low since the academy opened, attainment is steadily improving. In the current Year 11 a significant proportion of students are on target to achieve average standards in national examinations. Given that just under half of the students in this year group have special educational needs, this represents outstanding progress and reflects how well their underachievement at the predecessor school has been tackled. Standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 are broadly average. In Year 9 nearly one third of students have been identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, an impressive proportion of higher-attaining students in this year group have been entered early for the GCSE examinations in mathematics and science. Given their exceptionally low starting points on entry into the academy, this indicates that these students are making outstanding progress in their learning and their achievement is exceptional. The learning and progress of students with action plans for special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved significantly over the past year. This is because these students are no longer withdrawn from class and benefit from working alongside their higher attaining peers.

Youngsters enjoy their learning and are well focused and engaged in lessons. Much of the behaviour seen in lessons and in around the academy was exemplary with students being polite and courteous to visitors. Although students admit that there are a few of their peers who occasionally distract lessons with their inappropriate behaviour, it no longer disrupts learning because it is dealt with quickly and efficiently. Behaviour in the local area is generally now well regarded. The students' support of a range of local and national charity events demonstrates a good understanding of the wider community and influences their social development. Spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory and developing with the growing experiences to which students access and relate. Students play a key role in promoting their specialist academy by supporting reading and acting as classroom

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assistants in the local primary schools, through their involvement with an ecological project and by taking part with a marine conservation scheme. Students explain that they feel safe and very well cared for in the academy. They know how to eat sensibly and have a deepening understanding of making healthy life choices. Attendance rates are improving year-on-year but a very small minority of families persistently flouts the exceptional efforts made by the academy to ensure that their children receive the best possible life chances. Despite improvements in the use of key skills, the high standards reached in vocational courses and their excellent experiences working in local and national companies, these low attendance rates impact negatively on students' future economic well-being.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Well-planned lessons with a clear learning focus are taught by specialists with good subject knowledge and high expectations of the students. They are well supported by high quality teaching assistants who are suitably deployed to use their subject knowledge. Tasks are effectively organised and good use is made of prompts and resources. This was exemplified extremely well in a Year 7 English lesson where the teacher demonstrated the differences between archaic and modern English by modelling a Shakespearean role. The highly-engaging presence of the teacher ensured that the learning was clear and the students were eagerly engaged in the session. Skilful questioning and the modelling of high quality work are used well to extend learning. Most teachers verbally explain to the students how they can improve their work and when marking some write helpful comments in their books.

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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However, this is not a consistent feature throughout the school.

Curriculum programmes have been skilfully crafted to link closely with the academy's specialism of Enterprise and Skills. Creativity, risk taking and financial capability are carefully mapped out in both academic and vocational routes of study. More-able students are fast-tracked to early GCSE entry and prepared well to follow the International Baccalaureate route. The highly successful foundation BTEC vocational courses enable less academic students, particularly the most vulnerable, to gain basic employability skills and develop an understanding of workplace ethics. The extension and enhancement of the curriculum is rich and varied, with some exceptionally well-targeted opportunities, such as the provision of a swimming group for vulnerable girls. Students in Year 7 make excellent use of these co-curricular activities but the uptake of these tails off as they move through the academy.

Meticulous attention is given to the care, support and guidance of the students and wider family issues. The direct employment by the sponsors of an exceptionally committed and highly professional social work team has enabled the academy to develop extremely close links with vulnerable families and individuals who face challenging circumstances. They work closely with specialist agencies to ensure that the youngsters learn at a sustained rate and their well-being is maintained at a secure level. The steps taken to ensure that all students attend the academy regularly, or are educated at home, are second to none. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included in all lessons and receive high quality individual support which is based on their individual plans of action.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The Principal, showing undeterred vision and determination, works well with her dedicated academy leadership team to ensure that the young people of South Bristol have access to good quality education. By setting challenging and ambitious targets, relentlessly monitoring the quality of teaching, and carefully tracking and analysing individual student progress, they are ensuring that there is equality of opportunity for all students. Standards are being successfully raised and this is paving the way for these youngsters to have the best possible start to their adult life. Recent changes to the leadership structure have been implemented to strengthen management and further embed the focus on raising student attainment and increasing the rate of progress made. Effective systems for ensuring students' safety and well-being are

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established and regularly reviewed.

Members of the governing body use their extensive and highly successful experience in the world of work to positively influence the way in which the academy is led and managed. Their outstanding links with businesses and educationalists support the needs of the academy extremely well. This is exemplified very well by the way in which members of the governing body strive to raise the students' aspirations through the funding of trips and residential visits, and involvement with local law firms and national banks that support them in career development and develop their enterprising skills. The governors and senior leaders work well together to progressively develop effective engagement with parents and carers. They are proud to see the rebirth of the parent forum where parental suggestions are gathered and included in the decision-making processes. By providing a daily opportunity to talk with staff at the school gate, using the new technologies to communicate with individual teachers and organising regular surgeries and consultation days, parents and carers are kept well-informed about their children's achievement, well-being and development. The exceptional quality of the school's communication with parents and carers is illustrated well by the number of weekly home visits which average out at 33 per week.

The academy engages well with a comprehensive range of partnerships that contribute to the learning and well-being of the students at Merchants' Academy. Key organisations support specific curriculum areas such as art and construction. The volunteer reading programme supported by local law firms has resulted in students with a lower than expected reading age making significant gains in their progress. The use of the academy's excellent facilities by local primary schools is much appreciated and supports the well-being of future of the youngsters who are potentially future students. By providing a wealth of activities for the local community to enjoy, such as gym membership, hairstyling services and the use of crèche facilities, the academy has demonstrated a good commitment to the locality. Engagement with other secondary schools and academies within Bristol for 'Black Dance' and football tournaments with Liverpool schools develop the students' understanding of diversity. Visits to a school in Spain, links with Kenya and Nepal, and a study of Bristol's role in the slave trade promote community cohesion well at an international level.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>

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<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

The new and developing sixth form reflects the academy's drive to raise aspirations and standards of achievement for all students. The curriculum offers a dual pathway. It builds on the academy's established success with courses which contain a work related element (BTEC) and offers a complementary academic pathway, the International Baccalaureate (IB) qualification. Students completing the IB course this year say that it has been challenging and enjoyable. They appreciate its broad and balanced range of study and several of them have offers of university places. Students on BTEC courses, such as hairdressing and construction, show a keen understanding of how their learning is developing specialist skills and enhancing their employability in a competitive climate. They make good progress, many of them exceeding their targets. The progress of students on the IB is less secure. Current progress tracking indicates a mixed picture, with variability between courses and between students. There are appropriate entry requirements to the sixth form. However, the academy has offered places flexibly to students with the potential to succeed but who have suffered from the legacy of underachievement in the predecessor school. There are some striking examples of the success of this inclusive policy, but there has also been some impact on retention and attendance, both of which are too low. Because of this the overall effectiveness of the sixth form, at this early stage of its development, is satisfactory.

Good sixth form teaching reflects the academy's determination to raise aspirations. Teachers use their knowledge of individual students to tailor activities such that they meet individual learning and personal development needs, for example by encouraging teamwork, group discussion and peer evaluation. Year 12 boys constructing a cavity wall were able to explain the methods they were using with clarity and pride. In an IB business lesson, students confidently explored the strengths and weaknesses of different sources of finance and made perceptive links with real business situations. Students feel extremely safe in their sixth form lessons and comment on how they have seen the academy change dramatically in this regard. As one student explained: 'Teachers inspire and motivate you to do well with your lessons. My teacher believes in me.' Students are appreciative of ways in which they are encouraged to think about the experiences of others and to explore their use of language to ensure that it is not unwittingly discriminatory. They make highly effective use of their Wednesday afternoon community action sessions, such as learning to mentor and support younger students or staging an academy talent show

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to raise money for Cancer Research.

Newly appointed sixth form leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the current provision. They are conscious of the need to evaluate the success of new courses as results are published and to plan accordingly so that numbers continue to rise and stabilise, attendance improves and progress is equally good across courses and for all groups of students.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	3
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

A small minority of parents and carers returned questionnaires. The vast majority of these felt that their children were happy making good progress at the academy. They considered that their children were taught well, kept safe and the academy was led and managed effectively. A small minority of parents and carers did not consider that the school dealt appropriately with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors observed behaviour in and around the academy and asked the students their views on this. Inspection findings are that behaviour is now good and that incidents are promptly dealt with. A small minority of parents and carers did not consider that the academy took account of their suggestions and concerns. Inspectors consider that ongoing improvements to the communication channels between home and school are helping to develop very strong links with parents and carers.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Merchants Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 107 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 751 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	30	59	55	8	7	4	4
The school keeps my child safe	35	33	61	57	6	6	3	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	44	53	50	4	4	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	40	37	59	55	6	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	37	35	61	57	5	5	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	36	54	50	11	10	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	21	71	66	9	8	2	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	37	35	58	54	5	5	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	32	62	58	8	7	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	30	41	38	26	24	7	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	24	58	54	11	10	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	34	32	55	51	6	6	5	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	47	44	48	45	8	7	3	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**

10 June 2011  
Dear Students



### **Inspection of Merchants' Academy, Bristol, BS13 9AJ**

It was a great pleasure to return to your academy to lead the recent Ofsted inspection. Many of you spoke to me or one of the other inspectors and we wish to thank you for your welcome and courtesy. We appreciated the way in which you shared your views with us and told us about life at the academy. You will, of course, want to know what we found and here is a brief summary.

We have judged your academy to be good and some of the academy's particular strengths include:

- the drive and determination of your Principal, senior leaders and your sponsors to move the academy from 'good to great'
- the good and often outstanding progress you make in your learning
- the way in which staff know you as individuals and provide you with outstanding levels of care, guidance and support
- your good behaviour and positive attitudes to the interesting curriculum
- the consistently good teaching which motivates you.

Most of you spoke to inspectors about the considerable improvement in behaviour. You explained that you felt safe and appreciated all the opportunities available to you at the academy.

We have asked the academy to make sure that the middle leaders take responsibility for monitoring the progress you make and to ensure that your work is consistently marked well so you are clear about what you need to do to improve. We have also asked the academy to embed the leadership changes to the sixth form, and evaluate the academic curriculum on offer in light of the low attendance and retention rates.

Despite outstanding systems to support regular attendance, not all of you make the effort to attend each day. It would be great if you could really make the effort and support the academy.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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