

# Mesty Croft Academy

St Luke's Road, Wednesbury, WS10 0QY

**Inspection dates** 11–12 June 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires special measures.

- Since the academy opened, attainment by pupils in Key Stage 1 has been below national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. It is declining further.
- Many pupils throughout the academy make inadequate progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils who are eligible for additional funding achieve significantly less well than other pupils in the academy.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do not make as much progress as most other groups of pupils.
- More-able pupils do not achieve well enough. Too few have reached the higher levels in national tests in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Pupils who are eligible for additional funding, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do not attend as regularly as other groups of pupils.
- Teaching does not develop pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills systematically.
- Many teachers do not accurately understand the levels pupils are working at. This means that pupils' targets are either too easy or too hard. Similarly, work in lessons is often not matched to what pupils can already do or what they need to learn next.
- Leaders, directors and many teachers do not have high enough ambitions for what all pupils can achieve. Nor do they have a realistic view of how well the academy is performing.
- Leaders have not kept a close check on teaching. They have not used the work in pupils' books or information from the academy's tracking system as evidence of the quality of teaching. As a result, teaching has not improved and achievement has declined since the academy opened.
- Directors rely too much on information from the school's leaders. They do not use information about pupils' achievement sufficiently to challenge leaders about underperformance or to oversee decisions about teachers' salaries.

### The school has the following strengths

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage learn well and make good progress.
- Pupils feel safe and are happy, enthusiastic learners. They behave well and show respect for each other, their school and adults.
- The academy caters well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are interested and knowledgeable about a wide variety of times, places and people.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons or parts of lessons across the school. Three of these were observed jointly with the headteacher. A series of short visits to classrooms was carried out to look at aspects of the school's work.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books, some with the headteacher, heard some pupils read and watched two assemblies.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and talked to pupils in lessons, in the playground and as they moved around the academy.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior staff, the Chair of the Board of Directors and the academy's improvement adviser. Inspectors spoke informally with other members of staff.
- Inspectors took account of the 43 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and one email sent by a parent. They spoke informally to parents at the start and end of the school day. The 19 questionnaires submitted by members of staff were considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation which included: the school's checks on how well it is doing and plans for improvement; evidence about how teachers are set targets to improve pupils' progress and records of checks of the quality of teaching; minutes of meetings of the board of directors; the school's information about pupils' progress over time; and records relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Sandra Hayes, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Malone

Her Majesty's Inspector

Michael Onyon

Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with 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.*

### Information about this school

- Mesty Croft converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2012. When its predecessor school, Mesty Croft Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The academy is governed by a board of directors.
- The academy is larger than most primary schools.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs who are supported through school action is small and is lower than in most schools. Around one in ten pupils is supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs. This is slightly higher than the national figure.
- Almost a third of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional funding from the government to support the achievement of pupils who are eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority. This proportion is higher than in most schools.
- Most pupils are of White British origin and speak English as their first language.
- The academy has a service level agreement with Sandwell local authority school improvement services to provide an annual cycle of visits aimed at checking the accuracy of the academy's self-evaluation.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum standard for pupils' attainment and progress.

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

- Ensure teaching enables all groups of pupils to make at least good, and where necessary very rapid progress, so that attainment is at least average in all year groups for reading, writing and mathematics by making sure teachers:
  - accurately identify the learning needs of individual pupils
  - match targets and learning activities to pupils' needs
  - ensure targets and activities are sufficiently challenging
  - show pupils clearly how well they are doing, give precise guidance on how they can improve and ensure pupils act upon the advice given.
- Close the gaps in attainment between pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium, more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics by:
  - tracking the progress and attainment of all pupils precisely and focusing teaching on closing gaps
  - making comparisons between different groups in the academy and with pupils nationally so that all pupils achieve as well as they can
  - identifying pupils who are falling behind and taking immediate action to help them catch up
  - checking that all additional help given is having sufficient impact.

- Increase the impact of the academy's actions on reducing the absence rates of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs so that attendance for all groups of pupils is at least at the national level.
  
- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels upon the achievement of all groups of pupils by making sure that:
  - lessons in mathematics, writing and reading are sequenced in a way that systematically builds pupils' skills and understanding
  - performance targets for teachers reflect ambitious expectations for attainment and progress
  - teachers have the skills needed to understand and meet all pupils' learning needs in reading, writing and mathematics
  - checks on teaching are rigorous and use evidence from pupils' books and information from the academy's tracking system to make accurate judgements about its quality
  - leaders use these checks to give teachers specific guidance on how to improve pupils' learning and routinely check that teachers have followed this advice.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of the board of directors in ensuring that all groups of pupils achieve well by making sure that directors:
  - use information about pupils' achievement in the academy and nationally to build an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement
  - know about the achievement of different groups of pupils, particularly those who are eligible for the pupil premium, more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
  - challenge leaders rigorously where they identify possible underachievement
  - ensure that decisions about salary increases for all staff are linked to how well pupils achieve.

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

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is inadequate

- When the academy opened, the attainment of pupils in Key Stage 1 was significantly below the national average overall, and there were low standards in writing. Since then, standards have declined even further in all subjects. Inspection evidence indicates this downward trend is set to continue.
- Standards in Key Stage 2 were above average in English and mathematics at the time the academy opened, but have fallen since then. In the 2013 national tests for Year 6 pupils, test scores were just below the national average in mathematics and well below in reading, writing and the test for English grammar, spelling and punctuation. Results are likely to improve this year. Nevertheless, the current attainment of pupils in Years 1 to 5 indicates this recovery is unlikely to be sustained.
- Wide gaps exist in the attainment of different groups of pupils in the academy. Pupils eligible for the pupil premium perform significantly less well than non-eligible pupils. In the 2013 Key Stage 2 national tests, these pupils were around a year behind in reading, writing and mathematics. The academy's records show this gap is only likely to close slightly this year and is widening in some other year groups.
- Pupils make uneven progress as they move through the academy. They enter the Nursery and Reception Classes with skills that are often below those typical for three- or four-year-olds. They get off to a good start and most leave the Early Years Foundation Stage ready for Key Stage 1. Progress slows down considerably in Key Stage 1. Despite their good start, the attainment of Year 2 pupils in 2013 was significantly below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils currently in Year 2 have made slow progress in reading, writing and mathematics this year, so standards are not improving.
- Pupils currently in Year 3 are a long way behind where they should be at the start of Key Stage 2. These pupils have made inadequate progress in writing this year, so are falling even further behind. While pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is not as weak as it is in writing, it is not fast enough to ensure pupils make up ground already lost.
- Progress in Years 4 and 5 is better than in some other year groups, but it is not yet good for all pupils. Pupils make better progress in Year 6 compared with previous years due to good teaching and extra 'booster' sessions, but do not have enough time to achieve as well as they should as they still have a lot of ground to catch up.
- The progress made by disabled pupils and those with special educational needs varies across the academy. In some classes they make good progress, but in many cases they make less progress than most pupils because of weaknesses in teaching and the limited impact of some of the extra help they are given.
- More-able pupils do not make the progress they should. This is why few have reached the higher levels in the national tests for Key Stages 1 or 2 since the academy opened. The proportion expected to achieve higher levels in Year 6 is expected to be much higher this year. This is not so in Year 2.
- Younger pupils' phonics skills (knowledge about letters and the sounds they make) have improved since the academy opened. Nevertheless, they do not always find this knowledge helpful when reading because the academy does not ensure pupils' reading books link to the

sounds they are learning. Older pupils enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about books. Some still struggle to read fluently because they are allowed to choose books that are too difficult.

- Pupils' writing skills are not built systematically through carefully planned sequences of lessons. This limits the progress they make. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to produce longer pieces of writing, so they do not learn to apply writing skills securely. Handwriting is often untidy, something older pupils say they feel uncomfortable about. Younger pupils sometimes struggle to read what they have written.
- The academy's haphazard approach to organising pupils' learning in mathematics has resulted in pupils developing gaps in their understanding. It also leads to time being wasted for pupils as they often repeat work they have been given previously.
- The academy has used the Primary Sports Funding to greatly increase the range of sporting and other physical activities on offer. Many pupils are now more active as a result.

### The quality of teaching

### is inadequate

- Many teachers lack the necessary skills to accurately identify what pupils can do. Consequently they do not understand the next steps individual pupils need in their learning. This means pupils' targets and the work set in lessons are too often not pitched at the right level, so pupils do not make good progress.
- Pupils' books and visits to lessons show teachers do not challenge pupils enough, particularly more-able pupils. Work set is sometimes undemanding, such as cutting out pictures in mathematics lessons, or a worksheet that contains limited opportunities for pupils to think and respond to questions. Some able mathematicians in Year 4 were set work recently that was easier than some they had successfully completed several months previously. This exemplifies why these pupils' progress has slowed down over the course of the year.
- All teachers are expected to use the academy's agreed 'steps to success' strategy to help pupils reflect on how well they have achieved a task. This is not done consistently, so has limited impact on pupils' learning. Where teachers follow this approach effectively, pupils have a good understanding of how well they are doing and what they could do better.
- The quality of teachers' marking varies widely. On the whole, teachers do not make it clear to pupils what they have done well or what they need to do to improve. Suggestions made are often too general. Many teachers do not ensure pupils act upon comments. Consequently, marking has limited impact on pupils' progress. Some teachers follow the agreed approach to marking effectively. This contributes to the good progress of pupils in these classes.
- A large number of teaching assistants work in the school. In some classes, particularly in Years 3 to 6, these additional adults provide good support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, helping them to make good progress. This is not so in all classes and is one reason why such pupils often do not make as much progress as other groups.
- Teachers often miss opportunities to check how well pupils are learning in lessons, so do not move them on to harder work soon enough. Consequently, many pupils spend time repeating what they can already do and make limited progress.
- The strongest teachers use skilful questioning to probe pupils' understanding and pose well-

pitched challenge to speed up progress for different groups and individuals.

- Teachers and teaching assistants in the Nursery and Reception Classes make good use of information provided by the Early Years Foundation Stage leader to create varied and interesting learning activities which focus on giving children the skills each one needs to be ready for Year 1. This is why children make good progress in these classes.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** requires improvement

- Although most groups of pupils attend regularly, rates of absence for pupils eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are high. The academy has not done enough to ensure these pupils attend more often. This is the key reason why the academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are polite and respectful. Their conduct is almost always good. Parents, staff, directors and pupils almost all agree with this view.
- In lessons, pupils are keen to learn and work diligently, even when teaching does not challenge them, or when tasks are uninspiring. Pupils behave equally well in different situations, for example when the class is being taught by a temporary teacher.
- Pupils know that bullying can happen in many forms, including on the internet, and through means such as texting. They know that it is wrong to insult people based on perceived differences. They say there is very little bullying in the school but that if bullying did happen teachers would sort it out immediately.
- Pupils show respect for the academy and help to keep it looking attractive. For example, they use the sports' and music equipment responsibly during break times.
- Pupils show a good understanding of how to stay safe in and out of school. They talked to inspectors about how the school has helped them know about road safety, water and fire safety and how to use the internet responsibly.

### **The leadership and management** are inadequate

- Leaders, including the academy's directors are not ambitious enough for pupils' achievement, so do not take the necessary actions to ensure that all pupils achieve well as they should. As a result, pupils' achievement has declined since the academy opened. Therefore leaders do not demonstrate the capacity to ensure pupils receive an adequate standard of education.
- Earlier this year, leaders adopted a new system for tracking the achievement of different groups of pupils. They have not analysed this information, so have not been aware of the extent of the underachievement of some groups of pupils, particularly those eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Senior leaders have devolved much responsibility for checking the quality of teaching to other staff. They have not ensured these checks are carried out adequately. Their view of teaching is based on lesson observation alone and does not take sufficient account of the work in pupils' books or information about the progress of different groups of pupils recorded in the academy's tracking system. Consequently, leaders have an inappropriately positive view of the quality of teaching.

- Senior leaders do not challenge teachers sufficiently about the underachievement of some groups of pupils, particularly those eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Teachers' performance targets do not address the wide gaps in attainment between different groups of pupils, nor do they indicate high enough expectations for pupils' progress. Some teachers have received performance-related salary increases even when their pupils have made little progress.
- Leaders have not checked whether teachers follow agreed policies and procedures, such as the marking policy and the process for using pupils' targets to raise achievement. They have, therefore, not been aware of inconsistencies in the implementation of these approaches. Such inconsistency is one reason why pupils' progress varies across the school.
- Subject leaders do not have an accurate view of pupils' achievement in the area for which they are responsible. They have introduced a number of initiatives aimed at raising achievement, but have not checked whether these are having the expected impact upon pupils' achievement. Some subject leaders are not following these agreed procedures in their own teaching.
- Leaders are currently reviewing how different subjects are taught in order to implement the revised National Curriculum from September. The academy's existing plans for pupils' academic development fail to meet the needs of pupils because they do not promote the systematic teaching of basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. The current topics studied provide a wealth of experiences which give pupils a thirst for knowledge and an appreciation of different times, people and places. These experiences, and the academy's strong focus on helping pupils develop tolerance, understanding and reflection, provide well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Almost all information received about parents' views was positive. Parents appreciate the efforts the academy makes to work with them. Inspectors agree with this view. Inspectors do not agree with the view of parents that pupils make good progress in the academy.
- The school improvement adviser visits the school once each term. This programme has had limited impact on improving pupils' achievement. Recent reports show that these visits have supported the academy's inaccurate view of its effectiveness.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that the academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The board of directors relies too heavily on information from the headteacher when forming a view of the academy's effectiveness. Directors do not use data about the performance of pupils to gain an independent view of pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. While some directors ask challenging questions about pupils' achievement, they are too prepared to accept answers without further investigation. This is why directors think the very low attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is acceptable and that pupils eligible for pupil premium funding are likely to perform less well than other pupils.
  - Because directors have an overly positive view of pupils' progress and performance, they have not acted to ensure decisions about teachers' salaries and promotions are linked to how well pupils achieve. As a result, some teachers have received salary increases in spite of the inadequate achievement of their pupils.
  - Directors ensure that statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137972
<b>Local authority</b>	Sandwell
<b>Inspection number</b>	444187

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	409
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The board of directors
<b>Chair</b>	Phillip Griffiths
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andrew Kirby
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 5560854
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