

Inspection of Ark Alexandra Academy

Park Avenue, William Parker Campus, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 2PG

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Ark Alexandra Academy increasingly understand that learning is important. Teachers encourage them to believe that they can achieve well. Most pupils enjoy their learning and feel happy at school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), however, do not currently have the right support to help them succeed.

Pupils are happy with the range of subjects that they have. Leaders recognise, however, that there is still more to do to widen choice. For instance, only Year 7 pupils have music on their timetable currently. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that sixth-form students have a wide choice of courses.

Overall, pupils behave well in the school. There is a calm and ordered atmosphere in lessons. At breaktimes, pupils enjoy socialising with each other. Most pupils feel safe and say that staff deal well with bullying. A few pupils think that adults could support them better.

Pupils and staff have had a great deal of upheaval following the merger, two years ago. The school is now growing in strength. As one parent commented, 'The improvement is noticeable and welcome. The new leadership has clearly taken the school forward.'

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

Leaders have made significant and rapid improvements to the content of the curriculum. Subject leads have looked carefully at their plans. They have sequenced the content correctly. This helps pupils to build up their knowledge successfully. Teachers are much clearer about what precisely they want their pupils to learn. They are also increasingly clear about what gaps pupils have in their learning. This thorough approach to assessment extends into the sixth form.

Staff have strong subject knowledge. This expertise informs and supports their delivery of the curriculum. Pupils trust in their teachers' competence. They learn in a focused and purposeful way. This clarity of approach is helping pupils to learn more and retain more. However, it is still at an early stage of development. Pupils are not yet consistently able to make connections to past learning. Sometimes they do not acquire a deep enough understanding of certain topics. This is especially true of less-able pupils and those with SEND. Students in the sixth form draw on previous learning more securely than pupils elsewhere in the school.

Overall, leaders are making sure the curriculum reflects the raised expectations they have of the pupils. They have reintroduced music. They have also increased time spent learning a modern foreign language at key stage 3. However, too few pupils choose to study a language at key stage 4.

Leaders have made the development of reading in the school a top priority. A clear focus on helping the weakest readers began last year. However, the effects of the pandemic hampered the expected impact. Leaders have redoubled their efforts at the start of this year. They have devised a comprehensive strategy, invested in resources and delivered training to staff. The work on reading has not yet had time to take full effect. As a result, the impact on weaker readers' progress is still variable.

A further focus this year has been on how best to support pupils with SEND. Again, this initiative is still relatively recent. Leaders have a clear strategy for development. They understand that they need to do more to identify pupils' needs. Teachers do not always have the skills to adapt activities or support pupils with SEND to access the curriculum and learn more successfully.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes have improved. Parents, pupils, staff and governors all agree that there has been a significant shift. Pupils behave well in class and respect their teachers. There is very little disruption to learning. Pupils respect the rules. Their attendance at school is improving.

The personal development of pupils has been a fundamental part of the school's work in recent times. Leaders have expanded the range of clubs and activities on offer. The school has recruited well to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and also to the Combined Cadet Force. Parents are very appreciative of the range of extra-curricular activities that are on offer. High numbers of disadvantaged pupils participate. The school makes sure that it meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide students in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. It provides appropriate careers advice and guidance.

Staff are appreciative of the rapid improvements leaders have made at the school. They understand and support the headteacher's vision. Staff believe that leaders consider their well-being and workload carefully. The trust has invested in the school. It has provided support with both teacher and curriculum development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders at the school make sure there is a constant and clear focus on safeguarding. The safeguarding team works with the trust to regularly review safeguarding procedures. Leaders ensure that all staff are well trained. They check staff's understanding throughout the year. As a result, staff are vigilant and aware of risk. Leaders are proactive in adapting the curriculum according to need. They ensure there is appropriate coverage of key topics.

Governors and the trust carry out their safeguarding duties diligently. They are well-informed and up to date with all relevant training. They check to make sure leaders carry out statutory safer recruitment procedures effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not made sure that the curriculum is sufficiently well designed to meet the needs of all pupils. This is especially true for less-able pupils and for those with SEND. As a result, not all pupils learn as well as they might. Leaders now need to accelerate their plans to help teachers become expert in their delivery of the curriculum to these groups of pupils.
- Weaker readers' progress is variable. Too few of these pupils are gaining full reading fluency. This impairs their ability to access the curriculum successfully. Leaders need to push forward with their reading strategy to effectively support all pupils who need help with their reading fluency.
- Too few pupils learn a modern foreign language or music. This means that they do not have access to a fully broad curriculum. It also means that only a small minority of pupils take the English Baccalaureate range of subjects at key stage 4. Leaders should ensure that more pupils participate in the full range of subjects throughout key stages 3 and 4.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

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.

School details

Unique reference number	139821
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10200859
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,393
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	140
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Marshall
Headteacher	Liam Collins
Website	http://arkalexandra.org/
Date of previous inspection	13 July 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up his post in September 2020.
- Since the last section 5 inspection, the predecessor school, William Parker Academy, has merged with Helenswood Academy to become the mixed school Ark Alexandra Academy. The new school opened in September 2019.
- The Ark Academy Trust continues to be the sponsor of the new academy.
- The school currently uses a range of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, history and design technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also reviewed curriculum plans.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements. They looked at relevant documentation, staff recruitment checks and training. They also considered how well adults in the school act on emerging concerns about pupils' welfare.
- Meetings were held with leaders, trustees and governors, including the chair of governors, the trust's director of secondaries and the regional director.
- The team spoke with staff and pupils to gather their views. They considered 193 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 79 free-texts. Inspectors also took account of 136 responses to the staff survey. There were 384 replies to the pupil survey, which were also considered by inspectors.

Inspection team

Yasmin Maskatiya, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Scott Norman	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Edwards	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Carlyle	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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