

# Mark Hall Academy

First Avenue, Harlow CM17 9LR

## Inspection dates

17–18 May 2016

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders, managers and governors have improved this school significantly since it opened as an academy. Their commitment to raising standards is clearly having an impact. This is a school that continues to improve.
- Teaching is of good quality and engages pupils' interest well. Teachers have good subject knowledge and most use assessment well to make sure pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve and this is evidenced in the work that pupils produce.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards their learning have been totally transformed since the school's opening.
- Pupils feel safe in the school and the systems in place ensure they are kept safe. They are proud to be members of the school community.
- Pupils make good progress over time, and from their different starting points. Progress has improved year on year since the school opened.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their educational career.
- Vulnerable pupils are very well cared for.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. They respect each other's views and show consideration towards their peers.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of leadership across all subject areas is not yet consistently strong.
- Members of the governing body have not challenged the school's senior leaders with sufficient rigour in the past.
- A few subject areas do not fully implement the school's assessment policy.

## Full report

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

- Make leadership outstanding by ensuring that:
  - all middle leaders are consistently effective in securing the best possible outcomes for pupils in their subjects
  - governors act quickly on the findings of the external review of governance.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers implement the school's assessment policy consistently, particularly but not exclusively in science.
- Improve pupils' outcomes further by continuing to close the gaps that exist between different groups of pupils.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The principal has clearly made her mark on improving this school since its opening in 2013. She has a clear vision for the school that is shared by teachers, pupils and parents. The school has made great gains since opening and continues to improve.
  - Leaders have successfully tackled a number of weaknesses that were a legacy from the previous school. Over time, they have successfully transformed the new school from a very low starting point, halting the decline in standards by exercising good judgement.
  - The school's self-evaluation summary document accurately reflects the current quality of the school's provision. This document is closely linked to the school improvement plan. Leaders regularly evaluate the progress made against identified action points. This enables them to review the impact of their actions and to adopt a different approach if deemed necessary.
  - The quality of teaching in the school is managed well. Leaders have eradicated most of the weakest teaching. Improving the quality of teaching has been at the top of the school's agenda. Teachers are constantly questioning their own effectiveness and are keen to develop their practice. Inspectors agreed with senior leaders' judgements of the quality of teaching.
  - Staff training is of a good standard. Performance management of teachers is used to target bespoke training and this is making a difference. Leaders now judge the typicality of teaching using information gathered from lesson observations, data over time and scrutiny of pupils' books.
  - The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils follow a range of suitable pathways that are best suited to their specific needs. A small group of pupils in Year 7 benefit from a specially constructed curriculum that nurtures their literacy and numeracy skills. The Year 7 catch-up funding has been used wisely to develop these pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy and is having a positive impact.
  - Extra-curricular provision is strong. Pupils are offered a wide range of clubs and activities. They enjoy attending these additional activities, which add an extra dimension to their enjoyment of school.
  - The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. A good range of activities develops this aspect of their school life, including World Book Day, rewards day, Mandarin day, and a broad range of school trips. The school's parliament is a good example of how the school promotes the democratic process of managing change. Pupils in this parliament are members of sub-committees, one of which steers the school's culture and ethos. These activities ensure that pupils are well prepared for living in modern democratic Britain.
  - Middle leaders, including subject leaders, are clear about their role in monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the work within their remits. Middle leaders are positive about the collaborative approach towards the school's improvement. One middle leader told inspectors, 'It's a team from the top down with no segregation'. Although most middle leaders carry out their roles well, there remains some inconsistency in the quality of middle leadership in the extent to which their monitoring is securing rapid improvement in their subject.
  - The trust has monitored very closely the progress the school has made since opening through its progress improvement board. This board meets termly and holds the school's leaders to account well. Minutes of meetings indicate that members ask pertinent questions of leaders and monitor progress against the school improvement plan with rigour.
- **The governance of the school**
- A strength of the governing body is the fact that it aims to be as effective as possible. Governors acknowledge that they have not always challenged the school's leaders enough in the past. The governing body has recently undertaken an external review of governance which highlighted ways forward in ensuring that governors provide the right balance of challenge and support to the school's senior leaders.
  - Governors know what the school does well and, through their visits, they know what challenges the school still needs to overcome.
  - Governors ensure that all school policies are reviewed regularly and kept up to date.
  - Governors ensure that only teachers who achieve their performance management targets progress up the pay scale.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's safeguarding policy is implemented consistently well. All staff have undergone training in the Prevent duty. The designated safeguarding lead is experienced and makes effective use of external agencies when the situation arises.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching is good. This is because teachers' planning is effective and allows pupils to make good progress.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive. Pupils respect their teachers and engage well in their learning. Teachers make sure that lessons stimulate pupils' curiosity.
- Most teachers use assessment well when planning their lessons. Pupils are typically provided with three pathways when approaching their learning: 'breakthrough', 'secure' and 'mastery'. Pupils can select the pathway to follow, and make appropriate choices. Teachers ensure an appropriate level of challenge and direct pupils onto the right pathway on the rare occasion that they choose one that is inappropriate.
- In an effective Year 7 English lesson on Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', pupils were given the task of being a journalist and to report the story of Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, capturing a good headline to relate the story of the lovers in the woods. Pupils talked about the difference in approach towards writing for a tabloid newspaper or a broadsheet and took part in an effective discussion about different language techniques to engage the reader. Pupils rose to the challenge and produced some effective articles.
- Pupils show a good awareness of their current working level and their targets, as all books provide a visual indication as to what the school expects each pupil to achieve and at what stage they are on their journey towards their target. School leaders have also ensured that parents understand the assessment tracking system, so that they can play their part in motivating their child at home.
- Most teachers make effective use of marking, which allows pupils and their teachers to monitor progress. The school works hard to ensure the accuracy of its assessment by working closely with other local schools to validate its findings.
- Teachers use questioning well in lessons to check that pupils have understood what they have learned and to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the topic in question.
- Pupils receive regular homework to ensure they can consolidate their learning beyond what they learn in school.
- Teaching assistants support pupils who have special educational needs or disability well by helping them understand the tasks set, while still expecting them to attempt the work themselves.
- A few teachers are not using the school's assessment systems to best effect. This means that these teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are not informing their lesson planning adequately, which acts as a barrier to pupils making the progress they should. Similarly, a few teachers do not use the school's 'SIT' (strength, improvement, target) system when marking pupils' work, as outlined in the school's assessment policy. This is particularly the case in science.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. During the inspection, pupils were attending workshop sessions on mental health. This demonstrates the care and attention paid by senior leaders towards pupils' well-being.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of the different forms of bullying and know what to do if they ever experience unkind behaviour from other pupils. They are confident that any incidents reported will be dealt with swiftly. An assembly during the inspection was used well to promote an online system for reporting incidents of bullying.
- E-safety is taught well in the school through its personal, social, health and religious education curriculum, as well as through the use of assemblies. Pupils have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe, and understand the importance of high-level privacy settings when using social networking sites.

- Pupils' transition from their primary school to Year 7 is well managed. They also receive good-quality guidance when choosing their optional subjects at the end of Year 9. Careers guidance is effective and pupils consider their next steps after Mark Hall Academy carefully. In the last two years, there have been no pupils who have not moved on to further education, employment or training.
- Pupils who are more vulnerable are well supported in the school's 'learning hub'. This facility is used well to develop pupils' weak literacy and numeracy skills. Sessions in the hub are used effectively to help pupils with their reading and to improve their handwriting skills. This facility provides a safe haven for vulnerable pupils.
- Attendance has improved over time and is close to the national average.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally well managed and has undergone a transformation since the time the school opened in 2013. This view is validated by parents, pupils and staff. Pupils move around the school sensibly and with due consideration for others.
- Attitudes towards learning are positive. Inspectors saw little, if any, low-level disruption in lessons and the school's records for behavioural incidents support this view. Pupils are quite clear about what constitutes acceptable behaviour and what does not.
- Pupils wear their uniform smartly and present their work neatly. They arrive at lessons well equipped and ready to learn.
- The proportion of pupils excluded from the school is very low compared with the time when the school first opened.

## Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress over time because the teaching they receive has steadily improved and has had a positive impact on their achievement.
- Pupils join the school with prior attainment that is significantly below that of other pupils nationally. Attainment has risen year on year. The proportion of pupils forecast to achieve five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and mathematics, in 2016 will bring the school broadly in line with the national average set in the previous year. This represents good achievement. Senior leaders' previous forecasts have a history of being accurate.
- Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' books across all subjects and years supports the school's belief that progress is improving. This is particularly the case in the younger years, as these pupils have experienced good-quality teaching since their arrival at the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than previously. These pupils are targeted well through the teaching they experience in the classroom, as well as through smaller group work. Additional funding is used effectively to purchase extra resource materials, and to provide one-to-one support and well-targeted mentoring. Hence, the gaps in progress between these pupils and that of others nationally are closing. The school also works effectively with external agencies to ensure that children who are looked after by the local authority achieve well and that they are given suitably challenging targets.
- The school has rightly recognised the need to stretch and challenge the most-able pupils. Teachers present these pupils with 'mastery' tasks in their lessons and pupils rise to the challenge. Inspectors' scrutiny of these pupils' books across all year groups indicates that a greater proportion are making good progress than was previously the case.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress. Teachers and teaching assistants liaise with each other well to ensure that these pupils can access their learning. Work is adapted well so that these pupils can succeed in lessons.
- Pupils in Years 9 to 11 who follow alternative provision achieve well, and the school receives regular reports on their attendance and progress.
- Pupils enjoy reading and are encouraged to read regularly. Every pupil is expected to spend time reading during the school day. This has helped to develop pupils' literacy skills and broaden their range of vocabulary. The impact of this activity was evident when inspectors reviewed pupils' books and saw many examples of different writing styles. Numeracy and oracy are also targeted effectively through a range of subjects.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139271
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10011699

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	504
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ray Balcombe
<b>Principal</b>	Corinne Franceschi
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 866280
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.mha.atttrust.org.uk">www.mha.atttrust.org.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@mha.atttrust.org.uk">office@mha.atttrust.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Mark Hall Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It serves the town of Harlow. It is sponsored by the Academy Transformation Trust.
- Mark Hall Academy converted to become an academy on 1 September 2013. When its predecessor school, Mark Hall Specialist Sport College, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged 'inadequate' overall.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. An increasing number of pupils are joining the school from Eastern Europe.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or who have an education, health and care plan is average.
- The school uses alternative provision for a small number of pupils in Years 9 to 11. Alternative providers include Paringdon Education and Training, Aspire Academy and Pets' Corner.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 23 lessons, sometimes accompanied by the school's senior leaders, to observe pupils' learning and progress. In addition, inspectors visited specific lessons with a key focus to observe the progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Inspectors also scrutinised a large number of pupils' books, focusing particularly on the progress made by the school's most-able pupils and those who are disadvantaged.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, three members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and various members of the trust. Inspectors also met with three groups of pupils and listened to some pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including the self-evaluation summary and improvement plan, information on pupils' learning and progress, and records of the quality of teaching. They also looked at the school's behaviour records and the record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors considered 33 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 40 responses to the staff questionnaire and 16 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

## Inspection team

John Daniell, lead inspector

Simon Webb

Phillip Barr

Her Majesty's Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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