

Inspection of Mark Hall Academy

First Avenue, Harlow, Essex CM17 9LR

Inspection dates:

4–5 March 2020

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attend a school which does not meet their needs as well as it ought to. In many subjects, for too long, pupils have learned too little. There have been some improvements recently, but many pupils still have too many gaps in their knowledge. They are not suitably prepared for their next steps after Year 11. This has been the case for some time. In addition, leaders do not know how well different pupils benefit from the school's provision.

Pupils' behaviour varies significantly from subject to subject. Pupils lose too much learning time because there is too much unacceptable behaviour in some classes. Bullying happens, and adults do not deal with it well enough. Derogatory language is used too freely, and pupils lack confidence in adults to address this. Leaders' arrangements to safeguard pupils are not effective.

Pupils have recently moved into house groups. These new arrangements seek to develop pupils' resilience and sense of identity. There are sports clubs and trips, and pupils are encouraged to participate. Improvements in careers education help pupils learn about different careers and opportunities as they move through school.

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

The school has been through highly disruptive changes since the previous inspection. Reduced support from the trust, changes in senior leadership and high staff turnover have all played their part in the decline. Until recently, the changes left the school lacking the capacity to effectively address the problems. As a result of actions taken by the trust and senior school leaders, there are now signs of improvement, but provision remains weak in many areas.

Weaknesses in the delivery of the curriculum compound the issues caused by underdeveloped subject plans. Leaders realise that plans do not meet the needs of all pupils well enough. In science, for instance, the plans do not form a secure basis for the teaching in key stage 3. Classroom practice varies greatly. While leaders want pupils to develop an in-depth understanding of mathematics, for example, teachers usually focus on basic procedural tasks. There has been a high level of staff turnover at the school, leading to a lack of continuity and weak teaching. Pupils do not develop their knowledge and skills well enough over time.

Some teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and create an orderly environment in which pupils can learn; too many do not. Some lessons in some subjects are routinely disrupted by ongoing poor behaviour. This disruption limits pupils' progress through the curriculum.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is weak. The pupils do not get the right help. Teachers do not know how to support the pupils because leaders do not give staff the guidance they need.

Unkind, sometimes derogatory, language is used too commonly by pupils. Pupils do not always realise how inappropriate this is or how hurtful it can be. Bullying is not tackled effectively. Some staff do not deal with it well enough. New procedures for overseeing bullying incidents have been brought in but have had little impact. Leaders do not have all of the information they need to deal with bullying properly and prevent it from happening.

Pupils' personal development is stronger than other aspects of the school's work. There is, for instance, an appropriate curriculum plan for teaching personal, social and health education (PSHE) and a new approach to teaching pupils how to be resilient. However, there is more still to do to make sure that the planned PSHE curriculum is taught in an orderly way. The resilience programme is not firmly established.

In October 2019, trust leaders organised a searching review of the quality of provision in the school. This shone a spotlight on the real problems the school has. The trust has now invested heavily in helping leaders to put things right, including appointing two executive principals to work alongside leaders. This has increased the school's capacity to improve, and things are beginning to get better as a result.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders' procedures to keep pupils safe are not strong enough and have left some pupils vulnerable. Despite improvements, child protection records are not kept in line with school procedures. Records of bullying incidents have not been used to enable leaders to tackle bullying effectively. This has undermined pupils' confidence in adults to keep them safe. Too many pupils do not feel there is a trusted adult in school they can talk to.

Important information about pupils leaving the school part-way through the year has not been passed on to the local authority in line with statutory requirements. This means the whereabouts of these pupils remained unchecked for too long.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Safeguarding procedures are not good enough to keep pupils safe. Important information has not been passed to the local authority. Child protection records are not well maintained. Bullying records do not provide leaders with the information they need, and this has undermined pupils' confidence in adults. Leaders urgently need to ensure that all systems for child protection and safeguarding pupils are fit for purpose and are used well.

- Bullying and the use of derogatory language are not tackled well enough. Incidents happen more often than they should. Leaders should establish a culture of mutual respect among pupils and ensure that teachers deal effectively with reports of intolerance or bullying.
- Curriculum plans are not advanced enough to meet the needs of the different pupils in the school. For too long, the teaching has been far too variable for pupils to do well across subjects and key stages. Pupils do not learn as much as they should. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans enable all pupils to achieve well and that all teachers are skilled and effective in teaching them.
- Leaders do not give teachers enough guidance on how to support pupils with SEND. Provision for pupils with SEND is weak. Leaders should ensure that teachers are equipped with the information and skills they need to provide effective education for pupils with SEND.
- Too many teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough. Pupils' learning is routinely disrupted in some subjects. Leaders need to make sure that all teachers have the skills and support they need to manage poor behaviour and maintain positive learning environments during lessons.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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	139271
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10121503
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	780
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Bernard Dickenson
Principal	Manjit Hazle
Website	www.mha.attrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 May 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the trust had financial difficulties and withdrew much of its support from the school. The trust is now putting much more support back into the school.
- The school has had three changes of principal since the previous inspection, including the move by the current postholder from the role of acting joint principal to substantive principal.
- The trust is heavily involved in the running of the school, and two executive principals work alongside the principal. A regional director of education oversees their work. A new local governing committee has been formed and is in the early stages of its development.
- The school makes use of TBAP Aspire AP Academy (URN 140970) to provide alternative education for a few pupils.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- We did deep dives in the following subjects: English, Spanish, physical education, music and mathematics. We met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons and reviewed pupils' work in these subjects and spoke with teachers and pupils.
- In addition to the deep dives, we looked at provision in other subjects, visiting lessons, reviewing pupils' work and speaking with leaders.
- We met with the executive principals, the principal and other school leaders. We also spoke with the chief executive officer of the trust and the regional director of the trust, the chair of the trust and the chair of the local governing body, as well as a representative of the local authority.
- We spoke with staff and pupils about different aspects of provision.
- We reviewed the school's information on bullying and attendance.
- We reviewed records for child protection and safeguarding, and information regarding the removal of pupils from the school roll. We spoke with pupils and staff about safeguarding arrangements and held several meetings to discuss the leadership of safeguarding.
- We considered the 128 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, the 98 responses to the parent free-text option and the 31 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Andrew Hemmings, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Fowler	Ofsted Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector
Gerard Batty	Ofsted Inspector

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