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Liam Collins  
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Dear Mr Collins

### **Additional, remote monitoring inspection of Ark Alexandra Academy**

Following my remote inspection with Matthew Newberry, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), of your school on 2 March 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to provide education to all pupils during the current circumstances.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 (2) of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections remain temporarily suspended. It was additional to the usual monitoring process for schools that are judged to require improvement.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, this monitoring inspection was carried out remotely. As such, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would normally be the case during an on-site inspection. As a result, this letter provides a more limited level of assurance than our usual monitoring reports.

The inspection took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement. The school's most recent section 5 inspection took place in October 2017.

Having considered all the evidence and taking into account the impact of COVID-19 on the school, I am of the opinion that at this time:

**Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- continue to develop pupils' reading fluency and language comprehension within every subject so that pupils can acquire the necessary subject knowledge.

## **Context**

- Since the last monitoring inspection in December 2018, Ark Helenswood Academy and the Ark William Parker Academy have amalgamated to form Ark Alexandra Academy.
- You started at the school in September 2020. The senior leadership team has been restructured and now consists of one associate principal, two vice principals and four assistant principals. The local governing body was reconstituted in September 2019. Since then, three new governors have joined.
- During the autumn term, almost all pupils had to be educated at home at different points due to COVID-19. This includes pupils in all year groups, apart from Year 10.
- At the time of this inspection, a small number of pupils were being educated on the school site. This includes nearly half of pupils with an education, health and care plan and one third of vulnerable pupils.

## **Main findings**

- Leaders and those responsible for governance have ensured that improvements have continued over the past year, despite the national pandemic. Leaders began to implement a newly designed curriculum in September 2019. They adapted curriculum plans so that the knowledge that pupils need to learn was organised more effectively. These improvements were interrupted by the national lockdown. Leaders intend to continue their curriculum improvements as current restrictions start to be lifted and all pupils are back in school.
- Subject leaders have reorganised topics that are more difficult to teach to pupils at home so that they are taught when pupils are in school. For example, leaders decided to teach elements of the Year 9 mathematics curriculum, which leaders feel benefit from teachers supporting and explaining things to pupils face to face, later in the year.
- You have galvanised staff to produce and maintain an ambitious education for those pupils working at home. Leaders trained staff to use new technology so that they were ready to deliver the curriculum remotely in January 2021. The multi-academy trust, Ark Schools, has ensured that all pupils have access to digital technology. Consequently, in the most recent national lockdown, when

the vast majority of the school's pupils have been learning at home, pupils were able to learn using the school's online resources.

- Pupils working at home and attending school on site follow their usual timetable. Teachers deliver 'live' lessons to all pupils. The curriculum for pupils working at home mirrors the subject content that is taught to those who are attending school on site.
- From September 2020, leaders began to embed a new approach to improving reading. Teachers assess pupils' reading and provide targeted support. However, these approaches are currently being embedded and have not yet had the positive effect that is needed in order to improve all pupils' reading. Too many pupils have difficulty understanding and learning subject knowledge because they struggle with reading.
- Although pupils in Year 11 are less engaged with their learning, compared to other year groups, staff keep a close eye on these pupils so that pastoral support can be offered to those who need it. This has helped some pupils to remain interested in their work and improve their attendance at remote lessons. Pupils in Year 11 study the subjects that they normally would.
- Year 13 students receive carefully targeted support to prepare them for their next steps. Those students who are applying for a university place receive useful advice about completing their applications and some students are given extra help in preparing for interviews. Similarly, students who are applying for apprenticeships receive thoughtful guidance.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been steadfast in ensuring that therapeutic support from external agencies has continued throughout the national lockdown. Staff have also prioritised checking that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are receiving the right help, whether they are working at home or in school. For example, pupils with education, health and care plans that are working at home have individual contact with teaching assistants.
- Governors have monitored leaders' actions effectively. They have a good understanding of the challenges leaders face, particularly over the past year. Through their monitoring, governors have developed an accurate understanding of the education the school is providing in the current circumstances. Governors routinely challenge leaders. However, the recording of how the local governing body hold leaders to account could be sharper.
- The trust has provided extensive resources to ensure that no pupils are without digital access to school resources at home. The trust has also supported leaders development by providing mentoring and opportunities to work with other schools in the trust. This has helped leaders to think carefully about the school's improvement priorities.

## **Evidence**

This inspection was conducted remotely. We spoke to you, other senior leaders, four curriculum leaders, three governors (including the chair of governors), the SENCo, the regional director of Ark Schools, a representative from the Diocese of Chichester, several members of staff and two groups of pupils to discuss leaders' actions to provide education to all pupils during a national lockdown.

We also considered a number of documents provided by the school, including minutes of governing body meetings. We looked at samples of lessons that were being taught and examples of pupils' work. We also looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View and 135 responses to the staff questionnaire.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Ark Schools multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Harry Ingham  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**