

Inspection of Ark St Alban's Academy

Conybere Street, Birmingham, West Midlands B12 0YH

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected 10 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at Ark St Alban's because they are well cared for. Leaders know the local community well. Staff make time to get to know individual pupils and their families. Leaders have high expectations for what they want pupils to achieve. The school's aim for pupils, 'to make the most of their God-given talents by working hard to climb the mountain to university', is evident throughout.

Pupils behave well and attend school regularly. In lessons, pupils are respectful and listen carefully to their teachers. Pupils say that sanctions and rewards are applied consistently by teachers. At social times, pupils generally play together sensibly. Pupils say that if bullying does occur, this is dealt with quickly by staff.

Pupils can study a range of different subjects at key stage 4 and key stage 5 and achieve well. However, at key stage 3, some pupils do not study the full curriculum. This limits their experiences across a broad range of subjects.

There are several different extra-curricular clubs that pupils attend regularly. This includes various sports, cooking, drama and music clubs. There are also other enrichment activities, including a young enterprise programme and a girls' network.

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

The new principal has an accurate view of the school. He has quickly identified the strengths and areas for improvement. Together with other senior leaders, he has begun to make changes and has a clear plan to help the school move forward. However, plans for all pupils to learn a modern foreign language and computing are yet to be fully implemented.

Senior leaders have worked closely with middle leaders to ensure that the curriculum is well planned and sequenced. Leaders have been supported in this work through the trust network. The order in which topics are taught has been carefully mapped, so that pupils are able to build on what they already know. This is particularly strong in mathematics, where leaders have a clear sense of the knowledge and skills pupils need at the end of each year. Leaders have also introduced plans for each subject that set out the key knowledge and ideas pupils should remember from each topic. This has strengthened the way the curriculum is taught and is helping pupils to know and remember more in the long term.

Leaders provide time for teachers to meet to review the curriculum. Teachers work together closely to plan lessons and share ideas and resources. As a result of this collaboration, lessons are planned effectively to help pupils remember more of what they are taught.

Teachers carry out various checks on learning to see what pupils can remember. This includes activities at the start of lessons and at the end of topics. Teachers also use

ongoing 'low-stakes' tests to help identify where there may be gaps in learning. This helps to ensure that pupils are more secure in what they know.

Reading is a high priority for the school. Leaders have put in place a well-structured reading recovery programme for several pupils in key stage 3. This helps pupils develop their understanding of phonic sounds and words. Teachers check pupils' reading skills regularly and quickly identify where pupils need further help and support. As a result, pupils make strong progress in their reading.

At present, pupils who are part of the reading recovery programme do not study a modern foreign language. This is contributing to a declining number of pupils opting to study languages at key stage 4. In addition, current pupils in key stage 3 do not study computing. New leaders recognise that this needs to change, and have plans to address this.

Leaders have started to provide more support to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This has included recent training with staff in relation to autism spectrum disorder and dyslexia. Leaders have provided further training to teaching assistants to look at strengthening their support for pupils with speech and language needs. Until recently, leaders had not regularly reviewed the learning plans for pupils with SEND. This means that some pupils with SEND have not always benefited from the precise support they need in order to access learning.

Leaders have carefully mapped the school's pastoral curriculum. This includes relationships and sex education that develops pupils' knowledge in an age-appropriate way. Pupils explore a range of topics, including identity, rights and responsibilities, safety and security, and health. Leaders have ensured that there is a comprehensive careers programme, including for those in the sixth form. All pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 have a careers interview. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to meet with employers as well as representatives of further and higher education establishments. The school is rightly proud that the majority of Year 13 students secured a place at university in 2021, and several have gone on to study medicine.

Trust leaders provided effective support to the school when it was only open to some pupils due to COVID-19 restrictions. This included making sure that all pupils had a digital device to access remote learning. However, in the past, trust leaders have not provided enough scrutiny around decisions about the key stage 3 curriculum and the provision for pupils with SEND. Trust leaders are aware of this and have started to take action.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on all staff. Leaders have a strong understanding of safeguarding and the risks that pupils face in the local area. There are clear systems and processes in place for recording incidents and acting on

concerns. Referrals to external agencies are made in a timely way to ensure that pupils get the help they need. Staff receive ongoing training on safeguarding throughout the year to ensure that their knowledge is kept up to date. Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe through the pastoral curriculum, including in relation to issues relating to consent.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Currently, a large proportion of pupils in key stage 3 do not study a modern foreign language and computing. This means that pupils do not have access to a broad range of subjects. In addition, the number of pupils opting to study a language at key stage 4 is declining. Leaders should ensure that all pupils study a broad and ambitious curriculum at key stage 3, as exemplified by the national curriculum.
- In the recent past, leaders have not regularly reviewed and evaluated the needs of those pupils with SEND. This means that some pupils with SEND have not benefited from the precise support and help they need. Leaders should ensure that all teachers provide effective support to pupils with SEND, and that learning plans are reviewed more regularly to check that they are fit for purpose.
- Previously, trust leaders have not evaluated fully the impact of decisions made by school leaders. This has led to some pupils not having access to a broad curriculum at key stage 3 and the needs of pupils with SEND not being met effectively. Governors and trust leaders should provide effective strategic oversight of the decisions made by school leaders, so that all pupils, including pupils with SEND, benefit from a high-quality key stage 3 curriculum.

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	135970
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10202704
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy special 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	908
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	179
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Marshall
Principal	Guy Rimmer
Website	http://arkstalbans.org
Date of previous inspection	7 December 2015, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The principal has been in post since September 2020.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers.
- Ark St Alban's is a Church of England school. Its last section 48 inspection took place in March 2017. Section 48 inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They restarted in September 2021. The next inspection will be within eight years of the previous section 48 inspection.

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 had 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.

- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- Inspectors focused on the following subjects: mathematics, science, languages and computing. Inspectors examined leaders' plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about the way these subjects are taught. They also looked at other subjects to check how these are planned and taught.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. The school's website was also checked.
- Inspectors talked to staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements. They examined how leaders make employment checks on staff and scrutinised further safeguarding records. They also asked how incidents reported by pupils are recorded and analysed.
- Inspectors observed during informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors held meetings with trust leaders, the principal, senior leaders, curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tim Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Mike Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Hoddinott	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022