

Inspection of a good school: Ark Boulton Academy

Golden Hillock Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham, West Midlands B11 2QG

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 July 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial section 8 inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full section 5 inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils wear their distinctive uniform with pride. They are smart and polite. Pupils treat the school environment with care. Litter and graffiti are rare. Leaders are quick to reward pupils who show self-discipline and commitment. Pupils value this. Most pupils are happy and work hard. Pupils know that staff will address occasional incidents of bullying. They feel safe and specialist staff help pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans to thrive.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Most staff work hard to support pupils because they want them to flourish. However, a small minority of staff do not follow the school's behaviour policy, so some pupils prevent others from learning.

In some subjects, pupils learn well. However, in others, pupils cannot link new learning with knowledge learned before. Leaders have worked hard to remedy this. This term, they have introduced sensible plans to improve pupils' classroom experiences.

Following COVID-19, school life is returning to normal. Pupils have re-engaged in extra-curricular activities, including the police cadets and the school choir. Others have created artwork to display at the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

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

In many subjects, leaders have designed a well-organised curriculum. In English, younger pupils read novels such as Jane Eyre. This helps them to understand 19th century Victorian life better. As a result, they can connect this knowledge when they read 'The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' in Year 10.

Some teachers use assessment well in the classroom. For instance, in history, pupils could not recall why one country opposed joining the League of Nations. The teacher stopped the lesson and refreshed pupils' knowledge. This helped pupils to reconnect with prior learning.

Leaders have effectively ensured that more pupils study the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects than before. Subsequently, while leaders know that there is more to do, EBacc entries have risen this year.

COVID-19 has stalled leaders' efforts to secure continued improvements. In some subjects, teachers do not follow the order of the agreed curriculum. Not all teachers check pupils' understanding well enough before starting new learning. This makes it difficult for pupils to add new knowledge to what they have learned before.

There is a high number of supply staff who cover lessons. While some lessons are settled and well-ordered, poor behaviour disrupts learning elsewhere. A minority of staff raised concerns about their workload and well-being because of the current staffing arrangements and some pupils' behaviour. Leaders are re-establishing clear routines and expectations for pupils. They have published definite and sensible plans to improve pupils' behaviour and the delivery of the curriculum, including recruiting a full complement of staff for the start of the new academic year.

Leaders have designed an effective programme to improve pupils' reading. All key stage 3 pupils read for 30 minutes daily. Trained staff help weaker readers. They adapt story books before these pupils read whole texts. These pupils learn to pronounce new words with skill. As a result, they read aloud with confidence. They can also pronounce new words with accuracy, such as 'Frankenstein' and 'Banquo'.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is strong. These pupils value the work of specialist support staff. These adults shape their learning to help them flourish. For instance, pupils with physical disabilities enjoy physical education and physiotherapy lessons. These sessions strengthen their muscles. Elsewhere, a Year 9 nurture group, with guidance, could complete complex mathematical problems. Staff understand what these pupils know and can do, which helps them progress.

Leaders have designed a strong personal development curriculum. Pupils learn about responsible behaviour in relationships. Pupils benefit from a well-planned careers programme. They attend careers fairs and welcome employers to school. Some disadvantaged pupils have joined the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. This engagement helped older pupils win an award for their 'Swap a Knife for a Life' presentation. Pupils are well-prepared for their next steps in education or employment and training.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspector agreed that English, mathematics, physical education, history and art may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders promote a strong culture of safeguarding. They rigorously monitor safeguarding practice. Staff receive detailed training about keeping children safe. They understand the challenges that pupils face growing up locally. Staff are vigilant and know who to contact if they have a concern.

The designated safeguarding lead maintains detailed records of pupils' needs. Teachers and supply staff can access this information to support pupils' medical and other needs.

Leaders make meticulous checks about the suitability of adults who work at the school. Pupils feel safe. They can get the help they need when they want it.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that all staff apply the school's behaviour policy consistently well. As a result, some pupils are not supported to behave well in lessons. This means that a minority of pupils do not learn as well as they could, and staff do not have the skills to manage this well enough. This can impact negatively on staff morale and workload. Leaders should make sure that all staff have the skills to ensure that pupils behave well.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers implement the curriculum consistently. This means that pupils do not learn as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that teachers deliver the curriculum effectively in all subjects, so that all pupils learn the curriculum and make links with their prior learning.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 3 and 4 May 2017.

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	140014
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10227073
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	905
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Marshall
Executive principal	Herminder Channa
Website	http://arkboulton.org/
Date of previous inspection	3 and 4 May 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The executive principal was principal of the school from September 2015 until October 2019, when she became executive principal. In September 2021, a new principal took up post but was appointed to a substantive post elsewhere in the Ark multi-academy trust in April 2022. The current principal started work in April 2022, having started her career with this trust in 2008.
- One pupil attends alternative provision and this provider meets DfE statutory requirements for registration.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors met with members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, the trust chief executive officer and members of the executive team.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, geography and art. In these subjects, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, and made visits to lessons. They spoke with all subject teachers, not just those whose lessons they visited and met with a selection of pupils.

- During the inspection, eight staff members were absent due to COVID-19 and a further 16 had left the school, having secured employment elsewhere. Inspectors did not visit classes covered by supply teachers.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for personal development. Inspectors talked with pupils in key stages 3 and 4 about relationship education and careers as well as personal development.
- Inspectors checked the single central record. They spoke with designated safeguarding leaders about safeguarding and child protection procedures. They spoke with a broad range of pupils across all key stages and discussed safeguarding with governors. Inspectors spoke with staff about their safeguarding training.
- The views of parents who completed Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were considered.
- Inspectors also looked at a range of documentation, including records pertaining to self-evaluation and school improvement. They also considered records and documentation relating to attendance, bullying, behaviour, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. They took account of a range of curriculum planning documents, including those related to relationships, sex and health education.
- 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.

Inspection team

Antony Edkins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tim Bassett

Ofsted Inspector

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