

# Inspection of Mark Hall Academy

First Avenue, Harlow CM17 9LR

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Inspection dates:

8 and 9 November 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5  
of the Education Act 2005

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

At Mark Hall Academy, pupils have experienced a lot of change in the last two years. They have many new teachers. Some of this has been unsettling. That said, pupils see how their quality of education has improved considerably. They learn a curriculum that helps them achieve well.

Pupils recognise that expectations of behaviour are much higher than they used to be. This mostly creates orderly behaviour. However, some pupils say that staff do not apply leaders' expectations fairly or consistently. Sometimes, when pupils get in trouble, their behaviour does not improve.

Pupils feel safe. They say that bullying is not common, and that leaders resolve issues well. Pupils praise how leaders deal decisively with any discrimination or unkind language.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive strong support. The calmness of the Orchard, the space set aside for them, supports their well-being. Many parents of pupils with SEND value the clinics and support sessions leaders put on.

Many pupils, especially younger ones, are happy at the school. However, too many do not feel leaders listen to their views. The curriculum for personal development does not help pupils to understand fully the ethos leaders are promoting.

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

The trust has acted decisively to raise standards in the school. They have put in place a high degree of support, such as bringing in leaders from other trust schools. This has led to rapid improvements in key areas. These include the quality of education, safeguarding, the provision for pupils with SEND and the way staff deal with bullying.

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum. They have put in place one that is well designed and relevant to the school's context. Leaders make sure pupils' learning builds on prior knowledge. They are ambitious for all pupils to achieve well. For example, leaders ensure the weakest readers get the help they need to read fluently and access the curriculum.

Teachers deliver the curriculum effectively. They are well trained and knowledgeable. When teachers are new to the school or the profession, they get the support they need. Teachers plan activities that support pupils to understand and remember the key knowledge. This includes for pupils with SEND. If pupils have misunderstandings, these get corrected. As a result, pupils develop what they know and can do.

Leaders have put in place a clear behaviour policy. However, they do not ensure that staff apply this consistently. Because of this, low-level disruption does not get dealt with as well as it should. This frustrates pupils who want to learn.

Leaders have not prioritised pupils' wider development. While there is a well-considered curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, it is not always delivered effectively. Because of this, pupils' learning experience is, at times, disjointed. They do not develop a deep enough understanding of learning that is important for their personal development, such as about healthy relationships. This does not help pupils buy into the values of the school. That said, pupils do learn much of what they need to be ready for life in the adult world. For example, pupils with SEND learn about democracy, and then meet the local MP and visit Westminster. Leaders make sure that pupils receive helpful guidance about their career choices.

Many parents appreciate the improvements that leaders have made. However, many others do not support or understand what leaders are doing. Leaders have not always explained to the community the reasons for change as well as they might.

Trustees check closely on the quality of the provision, such as equalities and the curriculum. Several governors are new to role. However, they know how to support and challenge leaders on their work. For instance, governors ask leaders probing questions about the reasons for suspensions. The trust and governors monitor leaders' work on safeguarding effectively, and regularly recommend improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are vigilant with their safeguarding practices so that pupils are kept safe. Staff receive regular safeguarding training so they know how to spot and report concerns. Leaders respond to issues quickly and thoroughly. They make sure that information is clearly recorded and well shared so the best decisions can be made. Leaders make prompt and appropriate referrals to agencies where needed.

Pupils learn how to keep safe through the curriculum. They know whom to talk to if they have concerns. Pupils value the helpful support for their mental health and well-being, including pupils with social and emotional needs.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not make sure that all staff apply the behaviour policy consistently. This means some pupils do not know what staff's expectations are and do not respond as well as they might when told to follow school rules. Leaders need to ensure staff get the training they need so they know how to apply the behaviour policy consistently and effectively.
- Leaders have not ensured that the PSHE curriculum is delivered consistently well. Because of this, pupils do not build up their understanding of what they need to learn in PSHE. This does not help them engage with the ethos leaders are promoting. Leaders need to prioritise the delivery of the PSHE curriculum and make sure that it is delivered as intended. This is so pupils develop the knowledge they need for their personal development, and can participate successfully in the wider culture of the school.
- Leaders have made substantial changes to all areas of provision, but have not explained the reasons for these changes well enough to some stakeholders. As a result, some parents and pupils do not understand or support the reasons for these changes. Leaders should engage better with parents and pupils, and explain more effectively the changes they make, so that parents and pupils can engage more readily with the improvements to the school.

## 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.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	148423
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10241714
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	760
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Paul Drayton
<b>Principal</b>	Manjit Hazle
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.markhallacademy.org">www.markhallacademy.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school opened as an academy with BMAT Education Trust on 1 January 2021. When its predecessor school, also named Mark Hall Academy, was previously inspected by Ofsted in March 2020, it was judged to be inadequate overall.
- Since opening, there have been multiple changes in leadership and staffing. Most senior leaders are new since then. This includes both of the deputy principals and the designated safeguarding lead.
- The chair of governors was appointed on 1 September 2021. Most of the governing board members are new since the school joined the trust.
- Since opening, leaders have restructured several aspects of provision, including safeguarding and pastoral leadership, the curriculum and the length of lessons.
- Leaders use one alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 11 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chief executive officer of the trust, senior leaders, other leaders, staff and pupils.
- As part of evaluating the quality of governance, the lead inspector met with the chair of the trust and the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, physical education, art and computer science. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also evaluated the curriculum in some other subjects, notably mathematics, geography and modern foreign languages.
- As part of the evaluation of safeguarding, inspectors checked the school's single central record, considered its safeguarding policy and procedures and spoke to leaders, staff, parents and pupils.
- Inspectors evaluated the quality of the provision for pupils with SEND, including meeting with the special educational needs coordinator, speaking to a selection of pupils with SEND and speaking by phone with some of their parents.
- Inspectors reviewed the 126 responses that were submitted from this academic year by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and 90 free-text responses submitted during the inspection. Inspectors considered the 38 responses to the staff survey and the 12 responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors made sure they met with a large number and wide range of pupils to gather their views.

## Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
James Adkins	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Shapland	Ofsted Inspector

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