

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Ark Blacklands Primary Academy

Osborne Close, Freshwater Avenue, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 2HU

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Inspection dates:

7 and 8 March 2023

## Outcome

Ark Blacklands Primary Academy continues to be an outstanding school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Ark Blacklands Primary has a culture of high expectations and tenacity. Staff share leaders' determination to empower pupils at this school to succeed. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), flourish academically and socially due to the excellent standard of education they receive.

Pupils' behaviour is exceptional. They diligently follow the school's rules of 'right place, right time, right thing'. Pupils understand that some of their peers may need a slightly different approach, and respect this deeply. They are kind, considerate and keen to help. For example, older pupils enjoy helping younger peers. Bullying is not tolerated and is rare. Adults deal with any unkindness swiftly.

Pupils relish all the school has to offer. They enjoy a wealth of carefully planned experiences, such as visits to the National History Museum, that deepen their knowledge further. There is an abundance of opportunities for pupils to develop talents and interests in the arts, music and sports. Participation in extra-curricular activities is high.

Parents are overwhelming in their praise for the work of the school. One parent summed up the views of many, stating that their children's development 'both academic and personal, has been astounding'.

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

Leaders have designed a rich and ambitious curriculum that has pupils' needs at its heart. Attention to detail is central to the school's success. Leaders at all levels ensure there is clarity about what is taught from early years onwards. Learning is carefully broken down into well-organised chunks so that all pupils build their knowledge logically and achieve remarkably well.

The personal development curriculum is exemplary. Staff share leaders' resolve to ensure pupils have the social skills to succeed. Across the curriculum, leaders carefully plan wider

opportunities to build on pupils' understanding. Character development is thoughtfully woven through the curriculum. Pupils learn 'habits of success' which include resilience and curiosity. They proudly take on a number of responsibilities across the school. For example, digital leaders support younger pupils in computing lessons and promote e-safety messages.

Pupils speak confidently about the importance of healthy relationships and treating others with kindness. They support causes important to them such as St Michael's Hospice. Pupils enjoy being taught about different religious traditions and the lives and experiences of diverse groups of people. They learn about rights and responsibilities. Pupils have a voice and actively support leaders to make positive changes. For example, the elected 'pupil council' is currently working with leaders to review the rewards system.

Leaders' use of assessment is highly effective. They ensure pupils with additional needs, including those with SEND, are accurately identified and provided with tailored support. Teachers receive high-quality training to confidently deliver the curriculum. They question pupils skilfully to check what they know and have remembered. Teachers quickly change their plans to address any misconceptions and gaps in learning. They carefully consider what resources and materials are appropriate for their teaching. For example, in mathematics, teachers use practical resources well to secure pupils' understanding of the calculation skills.

Pupils are confident, fluent readers who appreciate books and read widely. Daily story time is a joy for pupils. Across the school, pupils eagerly listen to the stories the teachers bring to life. Pupils talk with great enthusiasm of their love for reading and the books they have read. Well-trained staff expertly teach phonics. The teaching of reading begins as soon as pupils start school in Reception. They read books matched exactly to the sounds they know. Struggling readers, requiring support, get the help they need to catch up in daily interventions.

Pupils have highly positive attitudes to learning. This begins in the early years where the provision is exceptional. Leaders have developed an engaging curriculum and, as a result, children are extremely motivated. Across the school, pupils are focused and attentive in class. Leaders inspire them to be aspirational through planned trips to universities and visits from speakers employed in several sectors. As a result, pupils value education and the potential opportunities it provides them.

The trust and governors provide effective support and challenge for leaders. They check regularly on aspects of the school's work. Their self-evaluation of the school is accurate. Staff appreciate leaders' consideration of their workload and well-being. They are proud to work at this school.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils learn about how to keep safe through the curriculum, including online. They learn important safety messages from visits from the members of the emergency services. Pupils can all identify a trusted adult to share any worries with.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding. Trustees have a clear oversight. They ensure that staff have the training they need to recognise the signs that indicate a pupil needs help and support. Staff record concerns and leaders act on these swiftly. They make referrals to the local authority as necessary. Leaders work well with other agencies and, where appropriate, challenge them to achieve the best outcome for the family.

## Background

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

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be in November 2016.

## 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>	141021
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10240568
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	623
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Paul Marshall
<b>Principal</b>	Natalie Rankin
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.arkblacklandsprimary.org">www.arkblacklandsprimary.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	1 and 2 November 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Ark Blacklands Primary Academy is an above-average-sized school.
- The school is part of the Ark multi-academy trust.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club on site.
- Currently, the school does not use alternative providers.

## Information about this inspection

- 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 met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They also met with members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography and computing. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- During the inspection, inspectors considered responses to the pupil survey. They met with a range of pupils to discuss their views about the school and talked to them informally during social times.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised a wide range of information, including a selection of the school's records. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils about safeguarding and looked at how pupils learn to keep themselves safe. Inspectors spoke to the safeguarding leader about the recording and reporting of safeguarding incidents.
- Inspectors met some parents to gain their views of the school. They reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. They also took account of staff responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire.

### **Inspection team**

Laura James, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Catherine Hylands

Ofsted Inspector

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