

Inspection of Ark Pioneer Academy

Westcombe Drive, Barnet EN5 2BE

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 September 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

The principal of this school is Aishling Ryan. This school is part of Ark Schools multi-academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lucy Heller, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sir Paul Marshall.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an exceptional school where pupils flourish. The school has the highest expectations for what pupils can achieve. Teachers encourage their pupils to aim high in their aspirations. Pupils in the school rise to these expectations at every opportunity.

Pupils take great pride in the school, and their behaviour is impeccable. They work hard in lessons and follow the instructions of teachers carefully. Pupils' views are taken into account and play an important part in developing the school. For example, leaders discussed changes to the behaviour policy with the pupil-led academy council.

The school curriculum is broad and ambitious. Teachers build on and deliver the trust-wide curriculum with considerable subject skill and expertise. Leaders ensure that pupils have ample time to develop their knowledge in the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects of English, mathematics, science, languages and humanities. Leaders organise an extensive range of enrichment clubs on a Thursday and Friday, which all pupils attend as part of the extended school day.

Pupils take on roles of responsibility in school and the local community and carry them out very seriously. The school offers pupils a range of leadership opportunities. All pupils in Year 8 take part in a social action project. Pupils in Years 9 and 10 engage in supporting the local community through the school's 'Altruism programme'.

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

The school curriculum builds pupils' knowledge and skills over time. Teachers have carefully thought about the order in which they teach subject content. In science, for example, teachers introduce scientific methods alongside subject knowledge. This allows pupils to deepen their learning through practical examples.

Teachers are experts in the subject they teach. They present new learning clearly. Teachers help pupils to build links between different pieces of knowledge. They help pupils to become independent and resilient learners. As a result, pupils have the confidence to attempt work that significantly challenges them.

Teachers are highly skilled at measuring pupils' successes. They routinely check what pupils know before moving on with new work. Teachers routinely use assessment well to measure the impact of teaching. The school swiftly identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers and support staff have the knowledge and skills to support pupils with SEND to excel.

The school places great emphasis on the importance of reading. Pupils read widely from a diverse range of authors and texts. Pupils have dedicated time for group

reading in class. Subject teachers take every opportunity to develop the literacy skills of pupils further. Pupils who are weaker readers or who are learning to speak English as an additional language receive expert help to catch up.

The school teaches personal, social and health education as part of its 'Values and Character' curriculum. All pupils take part in weekly debates about current affairs, such as the use of artificial intelligence. They learn about a wide range of cultures and traditions. Teachers encourage them to be respectful of each other's differences. Pupils have high regard for the school's value of kindness. As a result, bullying and discrimination are extremely rare and never tolerated.

The school has a sharp focus on raising attendance rates. Leaders work tenaciously with families to develop pupils' positive habits of regular attendance.

Each year, pupils hear from many visiting speakers from diverse occupations. Pupils learn about university education from Year 7. All pupils visit at least three universities by Year 11. The range of extra-curricular clubs, including sports and music, is popular. These clubs are in addition to the timetabled enrichment clubs, which all pupils attend as part of the school day. The school also encourages pupils to attend educational residential visits abroad. For example, pupils in Year 7 visit France as part of their modern foreign language studies.

Teachers are proud to work here. They appreciate the effort of school leaders and the wider school trust to reduce their workload and promote their well-being. Early careers teachers receive excellent support. The school has a thorough induction programme for staff. New staff members very quickly gain a secure understanding of the school's systems and culture. This ensures a high level of consistency in how pupils are taught and for all aspects of the school's work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	147061
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	10293302
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	898
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Marshall
Principal	Aishling Ryan
Website	www.arkpioneer.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened as an academy free school in September 2019 and is part of the Ark Schools multi-academy trust.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the principle, vice-principles and other school leaders. They also met with members of the trust and local governing body, including the trust's head of secondary education, the regional director and the chair of the local governing body.
- To evaluate the quality of education, inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, history, music and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons and spoke to subject teachers. Inspectors also spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils and staff members and reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online pupil and staff surveys. They also considered the views of parents who made responses to the parent online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

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