

# Inspection of Ark Alexandra Academy

Park Avenue, William Parker Campus, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 2PG

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Inspection dates: 20 and 21 February 2024

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

The headteachers of this school are Alex Birks-Agnew and Tommy Ittu. This school is part of the Ark 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. There is also an executive headteacher, Rhys Spiers, who is responsible for this school.

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

The school has extremely high expectations for all pupils. Pupils who are in school are learning well and making progress. There are, however, too many pupils who do not attend school regularly, including relatively high proportions of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and other disadvantaged pupils. This means that not all pupils are learning as well as they could be.

Pupils rightly recognise that behaviour is improving as a result of the school raising its expectations. Bullying is not tolerated and, when it does occur, it is dealt with swiftly. The vast majority of pupils concentrate and engage well in lessons. These improvements are recent, however. There are still too many pupils who do not meet the school's high expectations of behaviour, reflected, for example, in how many times pupils are suspended from school.

Pupils are safe and have positive relationships with staff. Most feel confident about who they can talk to if they have any concerns. They are polite and articulate and are confident to express their views. They know how to keep themselves safe online and the different ways to avoid risk. Many pupils are part of the Combined Cadet Force. They wear their uniform with pride and talk positively about their involvement in this. There is also a wide range of other extra-curricular opportunities in which many pupils participate.

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

The curriculum is extremely ambitious, including for pupils with SEND or those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The proportion of pupils currently in key stage 4 who study the English Baccalaureate GCSE subjects is rising. These high ambitions are also apparent in the sixth form. The curriculum across the school is sequenced meticulously well. Staff have strong subject knowledge and use this to deliver the curriculum effectively. The school's work to improve the curriculum and teaching since the last inspection is having a clear impact. Although this was not evident enough in examination results in 2023, pupils who currently attend regularly, including those with SEND, are achieving well overall. Often, teachers check pupils' learning during lessons to identify and address any gaps as they emerge. However, this is not always consistent across the school. Some gaps in pupils' knowledge have not been addressed fully enough, including for those who have been absent.

The school is committed to ensuring that all pupils learn to read and has created an impressive programme to achieve this. All pupils have regular opportunities to read a range of challenging texts, including in tutor times and in lessons. This continues in the sixth form, where students read regularly and have debates about a variety of texts. Those pupils who need additional support to become accurate and fluent readers are provided with the right help.

Too many pupils are not benefiting from the high-quality curriculum, especially more vulnerable pupils. While the school sets high expectations for behaviour and

attendance, some pupils are not attending school regularly enough. Additionally, there is a high proportion of suspensions because of pupils' behaviour, which means that these pupils also miss school. Pupils with SEND and other disadvantaged pupils are particularly affected by these two issues. There have been some recent signs of improvement because of the school's actions, for example through the effective use of internal alternative provision. However, as yet, these actions have not had enough impact on pupils' behaviour and attendance. Pupils' attitudes to learning and school are not yet consistently positive. Although the school has worked hard to ensure pupils know the importance of positive behaviour, some pupils do not fully understand this yet.

The opportunities for pupils to participate in clubs and trips are extensive. Many pupils, attend these. There is high take up by disadvantaged pupils in some extra-curricular activities The personal, social, health and economic education programme is clear, and pupils learn about staying healthy, how to develop positive relationships and what career opportunities they have. Pupils in the sixth form have access to a wide range of advice about their next steps, and they appreciate the support they are given to make the right choices. A number of pupils are involved in schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Leaders have high ambitions for all pupils and are firmly committed to achieving these. Improvements in the quality of education demonstrate this. Staff appreciate the support of the trust, and they value the training they receive. However, some improvements are not happening as quickly as they could. While the school's recent work to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance is showing some early signs of impact, more needs to be done before these are secure. Important partnerships are not consistently strong. Some staff feel that their workload is not being considered carefully enough when changes are introduced. The school's relationship with parents is variable. Some parents are positive about the school, but others are critical about how the school supports their children. While the school has taken a number of steps to communicate with parents, staff and pupils, the views of parents, pupils and staff are not always considered fully. More needs to be done to ensure the whole community has a clear, shared understanding that helps it to make a positive contribution to the school's development.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- Too many pupils, especially more vulnerable pupils, do not attend regularly enough. A significant minority of pupils do not behave well enough and are suspended. The education of these pupils is adversely affected. The school's

actions to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance must be fully effective so that all pupils achieve well.

- The school's work to engage with its stakeholders, including parents, pupils and staff, has not always been successful. This means that improvements to pupils' behaviour and attendance are not being made as swiftly as they could be. The school must ensure that its communication with the whole-school community is fully effective and that partnerships are strengthened.
- At times, teachers' checks on pupils' learning are not effective enough. This means gaps in some pupils' knowledge are not addressed sufficiently well, including, sometimes, when they have missed school. The school should ensure that all pupils learn the curriculum across subjects securely so that they achieve well, including in examinations.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139821
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10296388
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,557
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	84
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair/Chair of trust</b>	Sir Paul Marshall
<b>Headteachers</b>	Mr Alex Birks-Agnew and Mr Tommy Ittu
<b>Executive Principal</b>	Rhys Spiers
<b>CEO</b>	Lucy Heller
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.arkalexandra.org/">www.arkalexandra.org/</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	3 and 4 November 2021

## Information about this school

- The school is part of Ark Academy Trust, which it joined in September 2013.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Chichester.
- There have been some recent changes to leadership within the school, including the appointment of two new heads of school and an executive principal.
- The school makes use of two registered alternative provisions for a small number of pupils. It also makes use of its own internal alternative provision on site.
- The school provides a breakfast club.

## 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.
- The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the executive headteacher and a range of other leaders. They also met with a number of teachers, including early career teachers, and spoke to support staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, history, art, music and religious education. They discussed the curriculum design with leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers about the curriculum from the lessons they visited.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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 met with members of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors considered the views of 135 members of staff who responded to Ofsted's survey.
- Inspectors took account of the 467 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and the free-text responses and correspondence from other parents.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, both in response to Ofsted's pupil survey and from meetings with groups of pupils from across the school. Inspectors also spoke to pupils informally about the school.

## Inspection team

Zoe Enser, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Tash Hurtado	Ofsted Inspector
Judy Rider	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Potten	Ofsted Inspector
James Broadbridge	His Majesty's Inspector

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