

# Inspection of Ark Boulton Academy

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

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Inspection dates: 25 and 26 June 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

The head of school is Laurence Cole and the executive principal of the school is Ela McSorley. This school is part of the Ark Schools multi-academy trust, which means that 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 Tina Alexandrou. There is also a regional director, Gail Peyton, who has responsibility for the school.

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

Ark Boulton Academy staff and pupils share the same high aspirations. Pupils understand and follow the values of 'respect, curiosity and perseverance'. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and respectful. Community and togetherness are at the heart of this welcoming school. Pupils are happy in school. The majority of pupils work hard and show a determination to achieve well, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

There is a purposeful atmosphere around the school. During lessons and unstructured times, such as breaktimes and lunchtimes, most pupils behave sensibly. Where pupils' behaviour is not acceptable, staff speak quickly and efficiently with these pupils to explain the school's high expectations. Pupils are safe. They know who to talk to about any concerns they may have.

The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' personal development. Pupils can clearly explain their understanding of fundamental British values such as democracy. Pupil leadership opportunities include being elected to the school council. These opportunities help pupils understand how to be responsible. The extra-curricular programme is rich and diverse. Pupils regularly take part in activities such as the 'world ensemble', 'talk sport' and first aid. These opportunities enhance the curriculum well.

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

The school has undergone a significant period of change and improvement since the last inspection. This includes changes to staff in senior, subject and pastoral leadership roles. The school has raised expectations around learning and behaviour and has developed a highly ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum. Focused leadership has brought rapid improvement in how pupils learn in many subjects. However, these improvements have not yet led to consistently improving outcomes in all subjects by the end of key stage 4.

Most teachers check what pupils know well and ensure that they understand what they have to do. For example, Year 8 pupils in art can explain how their previous learning around the use of water colour helps them develop their own techniques within surrealism. Year 10 pupils in mathematics can demonstrate previous knowledge of the use of data and how this links to their current learning. However, some teachers do not check pupils' understanding carefully enough. As a result, they do not have a sufficiently detailed understanding of whether pupils remember what they have learned before. Some teachers do not consistently address any wrong ideas or missing knowledge, which limits the progress pupils make.

Most teachers make changes and adapt the ways they help pupils learn. For example in English, Year 8 pupils with SEND are given further explanations to support their work on a charity organisation. However, some teachers do not consistently adapt their learning to support all pupils. Some pupils do not have

opportunities to deepen their knowledge in all subjects. This means that some pupils are not always helped fully and are not always challenged to develop a greater understanding of the most important knowledge they need to know.

The school quickly identifies pupils with SEND. Teachers use 'pupil passports' effectively in order to support pupils' needs. The school has successfully developed strategies to support pupils who are not confident readers. Specialist teaching rapidly addresses weaknesses in pupils' phonics, grammar and comprehension. Teachers model reading and encourage pupils to read in and outside school. This is helping to improve pupils' reading across the school.

The school understands the importance of attendance. It takes highly effective and successful action to work with the small number of families in which pupils' absence is higher than it should be. Attendance remains a key priority for the school and community.

The personal, social, health and economic curriculum is well planned and sequenced. Pupils learn about topics such as healthy relationships and online safety well. The school provides pupils with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity. A comprehensive careers programme is in place for all pupils. Pupils engage enthusiastically with this programme.

All leaders, including those responsible for governance, understand how the school's local context impacts pupils' learning and attendance. The trust has provided rapid and effective support to develop the school. This has helped the school to improve. Leaders have implemented a well-thought-out professional development programme for staff. Staff feel very well supported and consulted about policy changes. Leaders carefully consider staff workload, of which staff are appreciative.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- In some subjects, teachers do not always check that all pupils understand and remember what they have learned. This means that staff do not always fully know whether pupils have secured the necessary knowledge and skills they need. The school should ensure that all teachers consistently check pupils' understanding in the key knowledge they need.
- Some teachers do not always adapt their teaching to ensure that all pupils are supported or moved on in their learning in some subjects. This means that pupils do not always have the opportunity to address gaps or deepen their knowledge and key skills in these subjects. The school should ensure that all teachers

consistently adapt their teaching to enable all pupils to develop the relevant knowledge and key skills.

## **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 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>	140014
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10290604
<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>	889
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Tina Alexandrou
<b>Head of School and Executive Principal</b>	Laurence Cole and Ela McSorley
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://arkboulton.org">http://arkboulton.org</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	5 and 6 July 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is part of the Ark Schools Trust. There are 39 academies in the trust.
- The school has had to manage the discovery of RAAC in the school building, which has affected the usual operation of the school.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- 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.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors focused on the following deep dives: English, mathematics, art, history and science. The inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about their learning. The inspectors also looked at the curriculum in other subjects.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about pupils' behaviour, attendance, the school's curriculum and improvement planning. The school's website was also checked.
- 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.
- The inspectors observed informal times of the day as part of their evaluation of safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors held meetings with the director of education, who is a delegated representative of the trustees, and a regional director of the trust; the head of school, the executive principal and other senior leaders; subject leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils. The inspectors also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather information about school life.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View and the free-text comments. The inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey and pupil questionnaires.

### **Inspection team**

Stuart Clarkson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jacqui Swindlehurst	Ofsted Inspector
Ed Leighton	Ofsted Inspector
Gwen Onyon	Ofsted Inspector

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