Inspection of Ark Charter Academy

Hyde Park Road, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 4HL

Inspection dates:	10 and 11 December 2024
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Christian Down. 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 (CEO), Lucy Heller, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tina Alexandrou.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff, pupils, parents and carers welcome the considerable improvements to Ark Charter Academy. The school has instigated a culture shift so that pupils are now proud to attend this school. Pupils feel safe here. The atmosphere is typically happy, kind, respectful and calm. Behaviour is much improved. Bullying and discrimination have reduced considerably. Pupils know adults will help if they have a problem.

Pupils appreciate leaders' high expectations for their achievement and try hard to meet them. They know that last year's GCSE results were much better than in previous years. Pupils are proud that, consequently, more pupils were able to go on to study the courses they wanted to at college. Current pupils are ambitious and aim to do even better.

The school helps pupils to understand and accept each other's differences. Representatives from the multi-academy trust, the Diocese of Portsmouth and the local authority all reflected that the school feels much more a part of its local community than it has done in the past. For example, pupils enjoyed the recent cultural day and are looking forward to the new student leadership group arranging more such experiences.

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

In the last couple of years, leaders and staff, supported by the multi-academy trust, have created a school community where pupils feel proud to belong. Pupils helped choose the school's values, which focus strongly on inclusivity and form the backbone of the 'character development' programme. As a result, there is now a culture in the school that is open, accepting and reflective of differences. Pupils are much more understanding of each other.

The curriculum has been reorganised so that each subject's curriculum is ambitious and logically sequenced. Pupils learn effectively across an increasingly broad range of subjects. For example, pupils now have access to more aspects of design technology and computing. Teaching is well organised. As a result, pupils are learning more, and their performance in public examinations is better than in the past. However, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge because of previous weaknesses in the curriculum, some low attendance and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The school's focus on checking for pupils' gaps in learning and adapting the curriculum to meet pupils' needs is well thought through and becoming well embedded. As a result, pupils increasingly know and remember more of the curriculum.

The school is raising pupils' aspirations. High-quality careers advice and guidance, alongside learning about how to keep safe in the local area, help pupils to think more positively about their future lives. The school's sharp focus on improving pupils' access to the curriculum by making sure that they can read well is transformational for many. Staff have noticed that as pupils get better at reading, they want to learn more, and their behaviour improves.

The school has made sure that the behaviour policy is applied consistently well. This, along with the school's work to reduce discriminatory behaviour, low-level disruption and truancy, has led to a rise in the use of suspensions. Over time, pupils have got used to the school's high expectations. Typically, lessons are calm, and pupils navigate the school site sensibly between lessons and at social times. Truancy has reduced. Consequently, suspensions are dropping. Staff remain vigilant as they skilfully support some pupils who need help to self-regulate their behaviour.

While attendance is not yet high, it is improving. Staff have worked extremely well together to ensure that behaviour, attendance, well-being and safeguarding systems are aligned. The school has improved its use of local external agencies such as those that provide support for pupils' mental health. The new 'Jonathan Centre' provides a safe and calm space in the school where pupils and their families can access support. All this has helped the school to gain a better understanding of its pupils and the local community. In particular, this is helping some pupils with very low attendance to come to school more often.

Staff rightly feel well supported by the school and multi-academy trust in managing their professional development, workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. This means that they are not achieving as highly as they should in some subjects. The school should ensure that learning is well adapted so that these gaps are filled and more pupils achieve the ambition of the curriculum.
- Despite highly successful work to improve the school's culture, a few pupils are not fully on board with the school's values. As a result, their behaviour and attitudes do not always reflect the school's high standards, and some do not attend regularly enough. The school should continue to promote the values that the school community has decided on, so that all pupils adopt them, suspensions decrease and attendance improves.

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	135965
Local authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	10341662
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	920
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tina Alexandrou
CEO of the trust	Lucy Heller
Principal	Christian Down
Website	charteracademy.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 July 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The principal and several senior staff have joined the school since the previous inspection.
- Ark Charter Academy is part of Ark Schools multi-academy trust.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers and one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school has a religious character. The school had its last statutory inspection of Anglican and Methodist schools in June 2017. Its next inspection is due in 2025.
- 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. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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.
- Inspectors met with the principal, other senior leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body along with the regional director and secondary lead of the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with a representative from the Diocese of Portsmouth and with the providers of alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, maths, art and design, design technology and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and support staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To explore the impact of the school on pupils' education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and well-being over time, inspectors met with leaders and staff to discuss the school provision. Inspectors also considered a range of polices and additional documentation.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, pupils and a representative from the local authority; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who submitted letters to Ofsted and who completed Ofsted's confidential survey, Parent View.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff who completed a confidential survey and gathered their views when meeting with staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Inspectors met with pupils to consider their views on the education they receive.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Matt Batchelor	Ofsted Inspector

Alan Johnson	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Summerfield	Ofsted Inspector

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