

Helenswood Academy

The Ridge, St Leonards-on-Sea, TN37 7PS

Inspection dates 8–9 July 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- English and mathematics GCSE results were below average in 2013 and 2014. Students did not make good progress in these subjects.
- The sixth form requires improvement because A- and AS-level results have declined since the previous inspection; students have not achieved well enough.
- A few staff still have low expectations of what students can achieve so their lessons are not challenging.
- A number of teachers do not tackle poor behaviour quickly, provide work that all groups of students can access, check whether students have understood work or mark their books well.
- Teaching in English requires improvement. Students' reading, writing and mathematics are rarely strengthened through other subjects.
- In the academy's first year, senior leaders and managers did not lead the academy efficiently or effectively. Weaknesses at all levels of leadership have not been fully eliminated.
- Inaccurate and disorganised statistics about students' progress, particularly for disadvantaged students, contributed to underachievement being identified too late in recent years.
- The gaps in achievement between disadvantaged and other students are large.
- The flow of some lessons in Years 7 to 11 is interrupted by students not behaving well and showing no interest in working hard.
- The promotion of students' understanding and appreciation of British values is not strong. Some key policies are not up to date or have gaps in them.

The school has the following strengths

- In many subjects, GCSE results in recent years have been in line with or above average.
- Teaching is very effective in mathematics and students work hard and enjoy these lessons. The performing and creative arts are strong.
- Externally verified predictions indicate that GCSE and sixth form results will improve in 2015 and future years.
- Students' behaviour outside of lessons is good and they feel safe. The academy's work to ensure students' safety and tackle bullying is good.
- Ark leaders and consultants have swung into action this year and generated significant improvements.
- Members of the governing body have much experience in education and other relevant professions. They are wise and determined, blending sharp monitoring with support.
- With many changes to staffing, middle leaders are increasingly effective and confident about their roles.
- The sixth form is improving at the same fast pace as the rest of the academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 39 part-lessons. Two of these observations were carried out with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed tutor sessions and an assembly.
- No Years 11 or 13 lessons were seen as these students had completed their GCSE examinations. No Year 12 lessons were observed as these students were on work experience. On the first day of the inspection, some Year 8 students had their rewards trip; some Year 9 students had theirs on the second day.
- Inspectors spoke to many students informally as well as meeting representatives from Years 7 to 10 and Year 12.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Principal, senior leaders and staff with responsibility for subjects and other aspects of the school's work.
- The lead inspector met the Executive Chair of the Governing Body (the Ark Director of Education Support), the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, one other governor (the Ark Research and Development Manager) and two Ark William Parker Academy governors. She spoke on the telephone to a consultant working for the local authority and met with Ark's Chief Executive Officer.
- Inspectors discussed their observations with teaching staff and examined a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, development plan and monitoring records. They also scrutinised information about progress, standards, exclusions, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors looked at a range of students' work in lessons.
- Inspectors took into account 36 questionnaires completed by members of staff and 73 responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clare Gillies, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Louisa Bonelli	Additional Inspector
Jane Fletcher	Additional Inspector
Philippa Nunn	Additional Inspector
Michael (Mike) O'Sullivan	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is a little larger than the average-sized secondary school with a small number of girls in the sixth form. It has been sponsored by the Ark Schools Education charity since September 2013, at the same time as its partner for the sixth form, Ark William Parker (boys) Academy. The Parkwood sixth form is now called Ark 6th form East Sussex.
- Close to nine out of ten students are White British with very small proportions from minority ethnic heritages.
- A well below average proportion of students speak English as an additional language, of whom only a very few are at an early stage of learning English.
- The proportion of students who receive support through the pupil premium is average. This is additional government funding for disadvantaged, specific groups, including students known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children.
- About 40 students a year are eligible for catch-up funding which is for students who did not attain the expected level in English or mathematics at the end of primary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average.
- In 2013–2014, 11 Year 9 students and 10 Year 11 students attended off-site educational provision at Eggtooth, College Central (a pupil referral unit), Rye Studio School, and Opt-in2. Half of them attended full time, the others for one day a week.
- In 2014, the academy met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy has recently been re-accredited with Investors in Careers status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and progress in all years by:
 - making sure, in all years, that teaching in English lessons is consistently effective and that teachers in all subjects focus on the quality and accuracy of students' writing
 - strengthening students' application of numeracy skills through subjects other than mathematics
 - checking regularly that every disadvantaged student makes at least the same progress as others
 - intensifying the support for students with low standards on entry to the academy
 - concentrating on increasing the number of high GCSE and A-level grades, especially for the most able students.
- Improve learning in the main school and sixth form by:
 - insisting that teachers apply the behaviour policy at the first signs of disruption in lessons
 - checking, during lessons, that students have securely understood work before moving on
 - raising all staff's expectations of what students can achieve and preparing work that different groups of students can access confidently so that learning never slows down
 - marking students' work regularly and effectively and giving them time to respond to the comments they receive.
- Make leadership and management sharper by:
 - insisting that all senior leaders are fully informed about their roles and monitor their areas of responsibility rigorously to identify where improvements are needed
 - presenting and analysing data about students' progress accurately and clearly so that any students who are underachieving are identified quickly
 - strengthening students' appreciation of British values and checking that all policies are complete and up to date.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- If leadership had been sharper last year, results would not have been so low, for example:
 - poor leadership of one of the two English GCSEs was not spotted early enough for all students to attain the best grade they could
 - inaccurate assessment and confusing analysis of disadvantaged and other students' progress contributed to their underachievement not being identified early enough
 - a lack of high expectations for all students meant that disadvantaged students took a narrow range of GCSE subjects.
- It took Ark representatives a while to penetrate and identify where the academy required significant improvement. In the academy's second year, Ark took a more directive approach; the Principal welcomed this opportunity to accelerate the rate of improvement. With a large number of changes to staffing at all levels, many weaknesses in leadership have been tackled firmly. However, until all senior leaders are fully on top of their responsibilities, leadership and management require improvement.
- External consultants from Ark and the local authority have contributed significantly to the academy's improvements. They have underpinned the now accurate assessments of students' progress and predicted performance in examinations. They have strengthened the quality of learning and the Principal's resolve to take firm action when it is not good enough.
- Another essential development is far better use of funds for disadvantaged students. Some changes, such as successful reading schemes and one-to-one tuition by subject specialists, have already been introduced; others will start in September 2015. This will support the academy's ethos that all students must have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- Many middle leaders have welcomed the culture shift generated by Ark and the Principal since the start of this academic year. They know that they must be the driving force for change. Practically all middle leaders have risen to the challenge enthusiastically. Staff responses to the questionnaire reflected increasing confidence combined with realism about issues such as behaviour.
- Middle leaders and teachers value the high quality training and opportunities to improve their practice and work together, in planning for example. The academy has wisely and successfully adopted many of the Ark programmes to develop staff's skills.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is gathering momentum but requires improvement until consistency, in marking for example, is established in all subjects. Senior leaders evaluate the quality of teaching accurately but not all of them incorporate the very best practice that exists in their own lessons.
- Leadership of support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs has changed this year and is set to change again. Ark input has been crucial here and academic and pastoral support is much better.
- In 2014, too few Years 10 and 11 students studied French or Spanish and/or geography or history. Reflecting the lack of high expectations in the past, only one-third of the most able students and less than one in ten disadvantaged students studied French or Spanish at Key Stage 4.
- Year 11 students in 2014 chose their option subjects before the academy opened. The curriculum has been revamped for the future so that more Year 10 students, including those who are disadvantaged, will study a modern language and/or a humanities subject. However, high expectations of what students can achieve have yet to be the norm in every subject. Enrichment activities and clubs are particularly strong in sports and the performing arts.
- Only a small number of students will access off-site provision in future years. Senior leaders monitor these students' attendance, behaviour and progress carefully, visit them and liaise regularly with the providers.
- Students and parents receive good advice about post-16 options and alternative places to study. Most students move on to sixth form colleges; only a quarter stayed on into Year 12 in 2013. An above average proportion proceeded into education, employment or training.
- Year 8 girls describe some assemblies as inspirational, especially when dance or music are involved. Several students could describe meaningful assemblies promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development but links to these areas, and relating work to students' lives, are not systematically emphasised in lessons.
- Students' comments suggest that their understanding of British values lacks depth. The academy did not arrange a mock general election. Half the Year 8 students interviewed had heard the word 'radicalisation' and observed that they had learned about parliament and women's rights but not, it seems, in the context of democracy or tolerance. The academy could do more in this respect to prepare these predominantly

White British students for life in modern Britain.

- Most staff are now working hard to establish a culture in which good teaching, behaviour and relationships are the norm, every day. Students are fully aware that discrimination is not tolerated.
- Parents are members of the academy's e-safety forum and anti-bullying committee. The few responses to the online questionnaire acknowledged the academy's keen work to prevent bullying but, as yet, do not reflect the benefits that academy status has generated.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are carried out efficiently, despite some policies not being up to date or complete in all aspects. Statutory requirements are met. All members of the senior leadership team have completed 'Prevent' training but so far training for teachers and discussion of these sensitive issues with students have not happened.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The Executive Chair of the Governing Body is the Ark Director of Education and Support who has a thorough understanding of the academy and knows exactly where further improvements are needed.
 - Other members of the governing body, including the Ark Research and Development Manager, bring much expertise and useful experience to their deliberations. The same is true of the Ark William Parker Academy governors who oversee the sixth form jointly with Helenswood's.
 - Governors know exactly what teaching is like and fully support the Principal's actions to reward effective teachers and tackle weak performance decisively. They have no illusions about students' achievement requiring improvement and how it is below national figures for similar schools.
 - The governing body was not given accurate information about pupil premium spending last year but it has confronted this. It now insists that members agree to future allocation of funds and monitor their impact on disadvantaged students' progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement because low level chatter disrupts too many lessons, especially when teachers fail to apply the behaviour policy quickly. A minority of students make limited effort to concentrate and learn sensibly. In a very few lessons, students lacked thought about the language they used.
- In contrast, when teaching is strong and they enjoy lessons, students are attentive, enthusiastic and take pride in the presentation of their books. Such good behaviour was seen in a number of lessons during the inspection. Apart from some over-boisterous behaviour in the upper academy, students' behaviour around the academy is good.
- Students mostly arrive on time in the morning but late buses do not help the academy's drive for punctuality. Attendance has improved since the previous inspection but despite the academy's determination, reducing the number of persistent absentees needs constant attention.
- The behaviour and attendance of students who attended off-site provision in 2013–2014 improved because they studied subjects at a level that matched their needs.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. This is because the academy has not made time in life skills lessons for students to discuss issues such as radicalisation or extremism, particularly in the context of British values. As well, a few policies related to students' safety are not up to date, have gaps in them or lack clarity for parents.
- The academy's good work to keep students safe is exemplified by its most effective work on e-safety. Convincing students that their social media comments could often be read by anyone, including academy staff, was a powerful strategy.
- The academy has taken many successful actions this year to make sure that students feel confident that bullying is unacceptable and dealt with promptly. The majority of students met during the inspection were confident that bullying is rare and that they do feel safe and well cared for.
- Students have a good grasp of the different types of bullying and are sensitive to homophobic or racist bullying, aware of different family structures and talk about these issues thoughtfully. Many students keenly take on leadership roles and help arrange charity fund-raising events.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Despite considerable developments this year teaching still requires improvement, particularly in English and to establish consistency within and between subjects.
- The weaknesses that are being tackled energetically but have yet to be fully eradicated include:
 - students' chatter or lack of concentration not being halted immediately
 - moving on in a lesson before establishing that all students have fully understood the work
 - irregular or ineffective marking and/or students not having enough time to respond to comments
 - not keeping up a good pace combined with a lack of high expectations, particularly for lower attainers, disadvantaged students and disabled students and those with special educational needs
 - presenting the same work for all students with some finding it easy and some finding it hard
 - forgetting to develop literacy by exploring new words or displaying them clearly
 - rarely using materials where students have to use their numeracy skills or insisting on accurate presentation, of graphs in science for example.
- Some lower attaining students cannot write accurate sentences and make many spelling mistakes. English teaching can be very effective but is not always strong enough, especially in Year 10, to encourage students' desire to try harder. A very recently appointed English faculty leader is aware of the issues to be tackled immediately.
- The Ark English and Mathematics Mastery programmes are having a successful impact on younger students' progress. This is particularly so for students with special needs, including those with dyslexia. Teaching of reading in sessions outside of normal lessons is increasingly effective with reading ages improving fast, especially for Year 7 catch-up students.
- The proportion of lessons in which students' learning is outstanding has increased since the previous inspection. Inspectors saw some very successful lessons, for example in mathematics where students worked keenly and attentively; instructions were clear, the pace just right and teachers' confident subject knowledge shone through.
- The humanities faculty, like several others, is making sure that Key Stage 3 learning is preparing students really well for Key Stage 4 work. The performing arts continue to flourish, particularly in dance. The stimulating displays of art around the academy contribute much to the environment.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement in English language and literature and mathematics because GCSE results in these subjects declined in 2013 and 2014. The percentage of students attaining five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics was well above average in 2012, the year after the previous inspection, but dropped to just below the national average by 2014. Several students attained English or mathematics but not both.
- Apart from the very small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, students did not make the nationally expected progress in English or mathematics. Partly because teachers lacked high expectations for them, the progress made by students who had disabilities or special needs, or low standards when they entered the academy, was well below average.
- Particularly in mathematics, disadvantaged students also made much less progress than that made by other students in 2014. Disadvantaged students' progress was closer to others than it had been in 2013 in English but stayed the same in mathematics.
- In 2014, the gap in English and mathematics GCSE results between disadvantaged students and others in the academy was over one and one-third of a GCSE grade in both subjects and the gap to others nationally was approaching two GCSE grades in both subjects. Both gaps increased between 2013 and 2014.
- A very small number of students were entered for GCSE mathematics before the end of Year 11, for personal rather than academic reasons. Many students took GCSE core science at the end of Year 10 to determine which science courses would best suit them in Year 11.
- The science faculty is aware that too few of the most able students took the three separate sciences in 2014; those that did attained an above average percentage of A*/A grades. Talented dance students make outstanding progress, particularly working with a professional dance company.
- An average proportion of the most-able students attained five good GCSEs including English and mathematics but the percentage of A*/A grades was low in mathematics; these students' progress in mathematics and science was below that made by similar students nationally. In contrast, those that took

a modern foreign language and/or geography or history achieved well.

- About half the Year 11 students took two GCSE sciences; they made average progress and all other students attained science BTEC qualifications. Many students attained work-related qualifications in computing and sports.
- In most other GCSE subjects, for example dance, drama, photography, business studies, catering or sports studies, results were average or above average. Achievement in these subjects continues to indicate good results in the future. GCSE results in modern foreign languages and the three humanities were good in 2014 but relatively few students took these subjects.
- Year 11 students in 2014 chose their option subjects before the academy opened. Things have changed with more Years 10 and 11 students, including those who are disadvantaged, now studying a modern language and/or geography or history. However, high expectations have yet to be the norm for every student.
- Students in Years 7 to 9 are making much better progress in English and mathematics than in the past because staffing has changed. At the same time, the Ark Mastery programmes in these subjects are generating secure learning and understanding.
- Externally verified information about standards in Years 10 and 11, and Year 10 work seen during the inspection, confirm that more effective teaching has generated a dramatic shift in standards and progress this year. Ark consultants have contributed to this.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are now achieving well. Stronger and well-organised arrangements for their well-being and academic progress are in place. The education provided by the academy meets their needs and continues to improve.
- Year 9 students who followed courses off-site in 2013–2014 made good progress in English, mathematics and science at the same time as strengthening their social skills; all of them are to be reintegrated into the academy in Year 10. Year 11 students at College Central also experienced a well-balanced curriculum and are predicted to attain some GCSE qualifications. Those at risk of permanent exclusion attained art awards at the Rye Studio School.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, A- and AS-level results, the percentage of high grades and students' progress have all declined. Until results are at least in line with the average in all subjects (matching students' starting points), achievement and teaching require improvement and continued Ark input.
- The small number of students who took work-related qualifications in 2014 made expected and sometimes well above average progress. All students attained distinctions in health and social care.
- In discussion with a few Year 12 students, they expressed their enthusiasm for being based at the Ark William Parker academy in Year 13 and only moving to use Helenswood's excellent dance facilities.
- These girls, much enjoying their courses, were confident that behaviour was good and that all sixth formers were keen to work hard; this could not be verified during the inspection. They had high aspirations and had been well supported in their career plans. Close to 90% of girls went to university in 2014.
- External checks on the proportion of subjects generating close to average progress confirm improvements this year, particularly in Year 12. Data based on accurate assessment of standards confirm the academy's confidence that results, at AS-level particularly, will be better in 2015.
- The recently appointed sixth form leader identifies a different culture since Ark became involved, and highlights developments which are already sharpening procedures, such as better matching of courses to students' aptitudes. He paints an accurate picture of what still needs to be tackled. Until the impact of these initiatives is evident in outcomes, leadership and management of the sixth form will require further improvement.
- The future curriculum will be mainly academic courses. Work-related courses being withdrawn are mostly those offered in local sixth form colleges. Enrichment activities include fitness, athletics, photography, volunteering in the local community, a model United Nations group and Duke of Edinburgh awards.
- Visiting speakers, including from the House of Lords and Stonewall, cover many topics of direct relevance to students' health, well-being and future lives, and promote their safety well.
- Sixth form entry requirements are that students should have grade C or higher in English and mathematics. There are lessons for the very few who have just missed this requirement; retakes are successful.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139996
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	450328

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1015
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Becky Curtis
Headteacher	Lucy Monk
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 October 2011
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