

Ark Boulton Academy

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

Inspection dates

3–4 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal, supported very well by leaders, the local governing body and the sponsor, has successfully addressed the many longstanding and deep-rooted issues that the school has faced. They have an uncompromising ambition for pupils' success. As a result, Ark Boulton Academy is a rapidly improving school.
- Staff share and contribute effectively to leaders' vision and aims for the school. Almost all staff identify the principal's inspirational leadership as a key reason for the school's improvement.
- Leaders work together effectively to evaluate the school's provision and to plan actions that lead to further improvements in learning, teaching and assessment and pupils' behaviour and attendance. However, a few leaders do not use the information about pupils' progress to address underperformance quickly enough.
- The large majority of pupils are making good progress from their starting points because learning, teaching and assessment are good. However, pupils' progress in history and drama lags behind that seen in other subjects.
- Teachers and teaching assistants mostly cater well for pupils of all abilities. However, the most able pupils in subjects other than mathematics and science and a very small minority of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not do as well as they can.
- The school's approach to developing pupils' reading and comprehension skills is wide-ranging and effective. A large majority of pupils enjoy reading and read widely and often. Leaders recognise that a majority of pupils' writing, spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting in subjects other than English need to be better.
- Pupils' behaviour and attendance are improving rapidly as a result of the school's effective monitoring procedures and subsequent actions. The large majority of pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and attend well. However, the behaviour of a few pupils in Years 8 and 9 disrupts their own and others' learning.
- Pupils feel safe and are safe. All staff are trained to identify potentially vulnerable pupils quickly and to provide effective early intervention and support where necessary. Pupils know how to recognise and reduce the possible risks and dangers they face in a modern technological world. Staff prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain through a range of well-planned and well-delivered lessons, enrichment activities and assemblies.
- Pupils receive relevant and accessible impartial careers information, advice and guidance. As a result, all the pupils leaving the school last year found places on suitable post-16 education and training programmes.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by making sure that:
 - the work set for the most able pupils fully challenges them
 - pupils who have an education, health and care plan consistently have work and support that help them do as well as they can
 - in all subjects, pupils' writing skills, spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting are of the same standard as they are in English
 - the poor behaviour of a very small minority of Year 8 and 9 pupils is eradicated.
- Further improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by making sure that:
 - all leaders use the information about what pupils know and can do to address pupils' underperformance quickly
 - pupils' progress in history and drama matches that seen in other subjects across all year groups.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The highly effective leadership of the principal and her senior team has ensured that the school has improved substantially in the last 18 months. Leaders have successfully challenged and addressed the deep-rooted issues facing the school. The problems in recruiting and retaining leaders and staff have largely been resolved. As a result, the quality of learning, teaching and assessment has improved significantly and the school's policies are consistently applied. Pupils told inspectors that having the same teacher and consistently good teaching has greatly improved their learning.
- All of the staff who completed the inspection questionnaire or who spoke with inspectors agreed that the school is well led and managed. Staff understand, and are clear about, what they and leaders have to do to raise standards further. Staff fully support the principal and are proud to be members of staff at Ark Boulton Academy and of the progress they and their pupils make.
- The leadership of learning and teaching is strong. A wide range of information from lesson observations, book scrutinies, pupils' progress and pupils' views informs the evaluations of the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. Leaders tailor teachers' training to meet their individual needs and focus on improving pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. The Ark network leaders (Ark Schools' teaching consultants) contribute to this process successfully by providing relevant professional development and the sharing of effective practice with other Ark schools. As a result, the large majority of teachers deliver interesting and engaging lessons that support pupils' learning and progress well.
- Pupils' behaviour and attendance have improved significantly as a result of the effective implementation of clear and unambiguous policies and practices. Leaders give this area of school improvement a high priority. The large majority of pupils have responded positively. As a result, the school atmosphere is calm and purposeful.
- Leaders make effective use of additional government funding. Well-targeted spending of the pupil premium has resulted in the differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally diminishing.
- The school is a 'fully accessible mainstream' school, and is fully accessible for pupils who have mobility needs. Leaders direct the support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Leaders use the additional government funding effectively. The special educational needs coordinator robustly evaluates the impact of the spending. As a result, most of the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making as much progress as other pupils from similar starting points.
- Leaders have used the Year 7 catch-up funding to improve the literacy skills of pupils eligible for the funding successfully. The large majority of these pupils make good progress in developing their reading and writing skills and apply their skills across a range of subjects well.
- The curriculum is well balanced and matched to pupils' needs and, as a result, they make good progress from their starting points. Leaders routinely evaluate the impact of

the curriculum on pupils' outcomes, progress, behaviour and attendance and make appropriate changes where necessary. Pupils value the broad range of subjects, enrichment activities and other experiences on offer. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who need to improve their literacy or numeracy skills have appropriate and effective additional support and intervention. Pupils throughout the school benefit from well-delivered impartial careers information, advice and guidance. All of the pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 in 2016 secured a place on a training or education programme. The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The focus on the Ark Boulton virtues, such as charity, honesty, courage and commitment, actively promotes the development of pupils' social skills, empathy and understanding of right and wrong.

- The large majority of middle leaders have played their part in making sure that the school continues to improve. They actively and routinely monitor staff's performance and pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. They share this information with senior leaders in order to implement appropriate staff training, support and intervention. However, a few middle leaders do not use the information about pupils' progress quickly enough to help the small minority of pupils who are underachieving.

Governance of the school

- Governance is a strength of the school and governors are ambitious for the staff and pupils. The school sponsor and the local governing body have a wide range of knowledge and expertise that enable them to challenge and support leaders, teachers and support staff effectively. Governors' roles and responsibilities are clear. They take responsibility for their own training and are well informed and up to date with key issues such as safeguarding, curriculum development and assessment arrangements.
- Governors, including the sponsor, routinely check the work of the school. They ask perceptive and relevant questions about pupils' progress, teaching standards and finances. They have a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and what leaders need to do to raise standards further. They have effective systems in place to make sure that the school continues to improve.
- Governors make sure that the school provides value for money. They use additional government funding well and the large majority of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, Year 7 catch-up and special educational needs funding make good progress from their starting points. Governors recognise that a very small minority of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those who have an education, health and care plan, do not do as well as they can. Governors and leaders have begun to address this lack of progress and that of the most able pupils successfully.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils feel safe and are safe. Staff complete regular and relevant safeguarding training. They fully understand their roles and responsibilities and make sure that promoting pupils' welfare is their highest priority. The school's designated safeguarding lead has

an in-depth knowledge of the potential risks and dangers pupils may face and makes sure that staff are vigilant and alert to these issues. As a result, staff identify and address issues quickly and effectively.

- The safety curriculum is comprehensive. Pupils successfully learn how to identify and manage potential dangers such as sexual or political exploitation and the risks associated with the use of social media. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy by avoiding the abuse of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes.
- Leaders, governors and staff make sure that the learning environment is safe, secure, clean and hygienic. Leaders carry out suitable risk assessments for a range of activities, including trips and visits.
- The checks on staff's suitability to work with children are detailed and thorough. The Ark Schools' human resources team frequently monitors these checks to make sure that they meet current government guidance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils will do and achieve and how they present their work. Routines and procedures are well established and the vast majority of staff consistently apply the school's assessment policy. Relationships among pupils and between staff and pupils are mostly positive, creating a climate for learning that is supportive and cooperative.
- Staff comment positively about the high-quality training and support they receive which has helped them to improve their teaching skills. Leaders provide time for teachers and teaching assistants to plan lessons and assess pupils' work together. Teachers and teaching assistants have a detailed and secure understanding of the needs, abilities and talents of their pupils. For example, teachers use the 'one-page profile', detailing the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to inform their lesson planning and the delivery of learning activities successfully. As a result, learning approaches are mostly well directed to meet pupils' needs. However, teachers and leaders recognise that the work set for the most able pupils in subjects other than mathematics and science does not challenge them enough.
- The vast majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and deliver lesson content confidently and accurately. They check pupils' knowledge and understanding and modify lessons and learning activities appropriately if needed, to make sure that the large majority of pupils make good progress.
- Staff have successfully focused on improving pupils' reading, comprehension and communication skills. Pupils have many opportunities to read a range of texts in different media. Staff insist that pupils answer questions in full sentences. Staff provide effective support for pupils who have reading difficulties or for pupils who are new to, or in the early stages of, learning English. As a result, this group of pupils make rapid gains in their reading skills and understanding of what they have read.
- The development of pupils' writing skills, including their handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar in subjects other than English, while improving, is still not good enough. Leaders are aware of this and have put in place suitable strategies, but are yet to see a significant and sustained impact.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders have worked relentlessly and successfully to improve pupils' attendance and to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent (missing more than 10% of lessons). As a result, pupils' attendance has improved significantly and is now in line with national figures. Support staff follow up on pupils' absence by telephoning home on the first day of absence and carrying out home visits. Staff suitably monitor the attendance and welfare of the very small number of pupils who are on short-term part-time timetables.
- Staff are fully aware of pupils who have medical conditions. All staff have received appropriate training for identifying and supporting pupils' medical needs and understand their roles and responsibilities should a pupil fall ill. For example, staff have copies of pupils' individual healthcare plans and know where pupils' medications, such as EpiPens, are located. The school works effectively with healthcare agencies to meet pupils' needs.
- Pupils' social skills and attitudes to learning develop well as they move through the school. Staff actively promote the Ark virtues, for example self-discipline, compassion, humility and service, through the curriculum, assemblies and enrichment activities such as charity work. Pupils demonstrate an understanding and acceptance of others' differences. As a result, pupils and adults work well together in a harmonious learning environment.
- Staff successfully develop pupils' talents, skills and self-confidence through a wealth of enrichment activities, such as sport, music, drama, art, cooking and modern foreign languages. Pupils value these activities and attend well. Pupils greatly value the support and help that staff provide. Staff prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. The vast majority of pupils fully understand how fundamental civic and British values contribute to a cohesive and positive society.
- Pupils are happy and confident to ask and answer questions in lessons. Pupils told inspectors that this is because staff value their answers and teach pupils to appreciate the views of others.
- Staff make sure that pupils understand the different types of bullying and the harmful effects of not treating people equally well. Pupils told inspectors that staff deal with any bullying incidents quickly and effectively. Pupils know who to speak to if they are troubled. Pupils can also email their concerns through the school's SHARP system and they said that they know staff will address their worries effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff and pupils told inspectors that improving pupils' behaviour has been the 'drumbeat of the school'. Pupils understand the school's behaviour policy and staff apply it consistently. Leaders have adopted zero tolerance of poor behaviour. As a result, the number of fixed-term exclusions has dropped significantly and is below

national figures, and the number of poor behaviour incidents has declined rapidly. However, a very small minority of pupils in Years 8 and 9 still disrupt their own and others' learning in class.

- Almost all of the pupils wear their uniform in line with the school's expectations and staff check compliance frequently and consistently throughout the day. The procedures to start the day are effective in 'setting the tone' and reinforcing the school's behaviour expectations. Good levels of adult supervision at breaktimes, lunchtimes and lesson transitions make sure that pupils move around the school in an orderly way. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that this makes them feel safe and that staff deal with any misbehaviour effectively.
- The school site is free from litter and there is no graffiti. Pupils respect and look after the school buildings, classrooms, displays and their books and equipment. The very large majority of pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They present and complete their work to the best of their ability.
- Pupils are polite and helpful. They are eager to explain how their school has improved and that lessons are now consistently much better than previously. Pupils told inspectors that they are much happier in school because pupils' behaviour is much improved and that the vast majority of pupils take their learning seriously.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Significant improvements in the effectiveness of teaching and stability in staff recruitment and retention mean that the large majority of pupils currently in the school make good progress from their starting points. This is particularly the case for lower- and middle-ability pupils. However, the most able pupils do not do as well as they can in subjects other than mathematics and science because the work they get lacks challenge.
- Leaders and governors use the pupil premium funding effectively. As a result, the differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally are diminishing.
- Pupils in Year 7 have work that matches their abilities and aptitudes. They make good progress in English and mathematics when compared to their final assessments at the end of key stage 2. Leaders use the Year 7 catch-up premium to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils eligible for the funding successfully.
- The excellent provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities results in most of this group of pupils making good or better progress from their starting points. However, a few pupils who have an education, health and care plan do not do as well as they can when their medical conditions negatively affect their attendance.
- Pupils in the early stages of learning English receive excellent teaching and support. As a result, they make quick gains in their reading and writing skills. This enables them to access the curriculum better and to make good progress across a range of subjects.
- Teachers develop pupils' mathematical fluency and ability to apply their mathematical skills to a range of problems well. As a result, pupils are making good or better

progress in mathematics across the school.

- As well as in English and mathematics, pupils currently in the school do particularly well in art and design, modern foreign languages and science. However, pupils' progress in history and drama is not as consistent as that seen in other subjects. Leaders have recently recruited teachers and subject leaders to these subjects and information provided by the school shows that pupils' progress is improving as a result.
- Most of the pupils enter the school with reading and comprehension ages significantly lower than their actual age. As a consequence, improving pupils' reading skills has been a major focus for the school. Successful actions and strategies have resulted in major improvements and impressive progress in pupils' reading skills. For example, most of the targeted pupils have improved their reading age by as much as a year or more in four months.
- Pupils' writing skills, handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar are not as good as they could be. Leaders have begun to address this but it is too early to see any significant improvements.

School details

Unique reference number	140014
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10025603

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	872
Appropriate authority	The academy trust
Chair	Julie Griffiths
Principal	Herminder Channa
Telephone number	0121 773 8156
Website	http://arkboulton.org/
Email address	info@arkboulton.org
Date of previous inspection	2–3 June 2015

Information about this school

- Ark Schools became the sponsor for Ark Boulton Academy in September 2015.
- When the school was inspected in June 2015, it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, Ark Boulton Academy was inspected on four occasions. At the previous monitoring inspections, leaders and managers were judged to be taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.
- Ark Boulton Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The number of pupils on roll is increasing significantly.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are supported through pupil premium funding.
- All of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and most speak English as an additional language. Only a few of these pupils are new to English or in the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

supported by the school is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.

- Pupils enter the school with starting points significantly below the national average.
- The school does not use alternative educational provision.
- The school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress by the end of Year 11, in 2016.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning across a broad range of subjects in all year groups. Inspectors also carried out an extensive scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with pupils formally and informally to gather their views about their learning, behaviour, attendance and welfare.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff, leaders, governors and a representative of Ark Schools.
- The views of staff were considered from the 98 responses to the school's own questionnaire. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be considered.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of information provided by the school. This included information on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour, school policies, the school's self-evaluation of its work, school improvement plans and information about safeguarding and the recruitment of staff.

Inspection team

Peter Humphries, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Josie Leese

Ofsted Inspector

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