

Ark Victoria Academy

Talbot Way, Small Heath, Birmingham, West Midlands B10 0HJ

Inspection dates

26–27 March 2019

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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The number of pupils on roll more than doubled at the start of this academic year. Prior to September 2018, the school catered for children in the early years and pupils in key stages 1 and 3. It now has pupils in all age groups, from the Nursery to Year 10.
- Leaders have managed the enormous change in the school's structure very well. They have put in place strong systems that enable the school to function as one coherent unit despite the complexities of its size and physical layout.
- Leaders set clear expectations for how teachers will teach. They provide substantial training and support for teachers. As result, the quality of teaching is strong and continues to improve.
- Teachers expect much of their pupils. They set clear rules about how pupils will prepare for, and behave in, lessons. As a result, pupils arrive at lessons ready to work hard.
- Some pupils feel that staff apply the rules too rigidly. Pupils understand and respect the rules but say that they want to be trusted to work hard without such strict sanctions.
- Sometimes, less confident teachers stick too closely to the agreed lesson structure. When this happens, it limits the extent to which pupils can reflect, think, challenge their understanding and so fully deepen their knowledge.
- Children achieve well in the early years. They settle quickly into school life because they are safe, happy and interested in the activities provided for them.
- Outcomes for pupils in other year groups have improved steadily since the academy opened. They are particularly strong at key stage 1. Pupils achieve well in other phases too. However, some of the more able pupils could do better in key stages 2 to 4. They do not always make the progress they should to reach higher standards in some subjects.
- Pupils conduct themselves well in class and at breaktimes. They walk around the vast school site sensibly. They are polite to adults and show respect for each other.
- The school is well led. The Ark Trust (the trust) sets a clear strategic direction and holds leaders to account for meeting its aims. The local governing body has an accurate view of the school's performance. Senior leaders monitor the school's effectiveness well and take decisive action, when needed, to improve its quality.
- Leaders are building a curriculum to reflect the fact that the school now provides all-through education, from the early years to key stage 4. Although this is still under development, early signs are very positive.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the more able pupils make strong progress in a wider range of subjects as they move through key stages 2 to 4.
- Ensure that pupils understand the rationale for how teachers manage lessons and that it is seen as fair and appropriate.
- Ensure that teachers are confident to adapt the structure of lessons so that:
 - pupils can contribute fully to their learning
 - lessons challenge all groups of pupils, particularly those with high prior attainment, to deepen their understanding and so make the best possible progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the school opened as Ark Victoria Academy, it has undergone significant change. It has grown substantially and expanded the age range of its pupils. Much of this has happened relatively recently. As a result, by September 2018, the school was more than twice as big as it was when it joined the trust.
- Leaders have managed the rapid and substantial change well. They have set up effective systems that staff in all parts of the school can follow easily. As a result, leaders have successfully created a large, all-through school that functions as a coherent unit.
- The circumstances that led to the changes in the school were unsettling for parents and the wider community. The trust and the school's leaders worked very hard to consult and inform parents of the developments. They were largely successful. Many parents recognise the school's strengths and they value what leaders have achieved. A few remain unconvinced that the school needed to join the trust or expand in the way that it has. Leaders are redoubling their efforts to work with these parents to help them feel they can support the school as it moves forward.
- The school's success is testament to the vision, drive and clarity of senior leaders. They believe that pupils deserve the best. Leaders accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work. They prioritise their actions appropriately and address the most significant issues first. Consequently, leaders have maintained and improved the quality of education up to, and since, the school's expansion.
- Clear structures of accountability ensure that leaders, at all levels, have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. For example, each year group in primary from the Nursery onwards has a 'head of year'. These staff lead the quality of teaching of their team, support teachers in following school policies and keep a close check on pupils' outcomes. Subject leaders fulfil a similar role in the secondary phase.
- Leaders have set very clear policies to ensure that pupils get a consistently good experience in all phases. Teachers share this ambition. They follow the directions diligently. Leaders provide effective training to help teachers put the policies into practice. Teachers appreciate this and act willingly on advice received. This is why the quality of teaching has improved since the school joined the trust and keeps getting better.
- Teachers feel valued and well supported by leaders. They say that the workload has been heavy, particularly when getting to grips with the new structures associated with the expanded school. However, teachers say that leaders listen to their views and do what they can to lessen the burden.
- Leaders are substantially revising the school's curriculum. They aim for pupils to build a rich body of knowledge across a wide range of subjects through each key stage. This work is well under way in the primary and early years phases. Leaders have identified how and when pupils will be introduced to important knowledge and when they will meet it again. This is helping pupils to develop an increasingly secure store of

knowledge to draw upon to help them with new learning as they get older. Leaders are now beginning to apply this thinking to subjects in the secondary phase.

- Through the curriculum and additional activities, leaders ensure that the school provides a comprehensive programme of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This helps pupils respect others and understand the rights and responsibilities they will have as British citizens.
- Leaders use additional funding for specific purposes responsibly. For example, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving because of appropriate use of the pupil premium. Similarly, additional funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is leading to better outcomes for this group. Pupils who are supported by the Year 7 catch-up funding are, indeed, catching up with reading, writing and mathematics.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective because:
 - trustees clearly designate responsibilities for the statutory and other functions of governors
 - trustees, the local governing body and school leaders carry out their respective roles knowledgeably
 - there is a high degree of accountability so that governors at all levels know what is working well and what is not
 - governors act as necessary to tackle weaknesses and support leaders in making improvements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that staff are well trained to spot when a pupil may be at risk. Staff report concerns promptly. Leaders work well together, and cooperatively with a range of appropriate agencies, to make sure that pupils get the help they need.
- Leaders are alert to the specific risks that pupils face in the local community. They act to educate pupils about the dangers of exploitation, gang involvement, extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers across the school follow the agreed routines and procedures set out in the school's policies for teaching, learning, assessment and feedback. As a result, pupils experience a similar quality of teaching in each phase and in different classes in each year group. Minor variations between phases exist. However, there are no notable weaknesses.

- The agreed approach to structuring and teaching lessons means that pupils know what to expect when they enter the classroom. Therefore, they quickly get down to work and complete tasks carefully. Pupils' books are well presented as a result.
- Teachers manage time carefully. Pupils respond immediately to their instructions. As a result, lessons proceed smoothly.
- Teachers place great emphasis on developing pupils' vocabulary. This means that pupils are learning appropriate technical language in subjects such as science and mathematics. Teachers also encourage pupils to use good-quality English when speaking and writing in all subjects. This is helping pupils, including those whose first language is not English, to develop confidence and competence as readers and communicators.
- Teachers in all phases have good expertise in the subjects that they teach. They use this to plan lessons that present pupils with appropriately challenging knowledge. Some teachers are particularly effective at making this meaningful and memorable to pupils. A very good example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson in key stage 3. The teacher skilfully drew explanations from the pupils. This helped them to really make sense of how to solve equations. As a result of teaching of this quality, some pupils make very strong progress.
- Teachers make clear to pupils exactly what they need to do to complete a task successfully. This helps pupils feel confident to get on with their work. Some particularly effective examples of this were seen during the inspection in mathematics lessons and pupils' books in key stage 2.
- In key stage 1, teachers organise lessons carefully so that they can direct attention appropriately to developing the language skills of each pupil. This helps pupils who are new to speaking English acquire the language quickly and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There are times when the school's clear structure for delivering lessons can limit the progress some pupils make. This is because some teachers lack confidence. As a result, they stick too rigidly to the suggested approach. For example, some teachers focus the pupils' attention too much on completing the task and not enough on the learning that is the purpose of the activity. When this happens, the teacher does not enable pupils to reflect, deepen their thinking or put into practice the high-quality language they have been taught. This situation has a particularly limiting effect on the most able pupils because it does not challenge them to the full extent of their abilities.
- Pupils enjoy their learning. They particularly enjoy discussing and debating ideas in lessons. They say this helps them feel involved in their learning. However, some say that they would like this to happen more often. They feel that, sometimes, teachers do not give them enough chance to speak in lessons. Consequently, some pupils feel teachers do not give them the freedom to take control of their learning as much as they would like.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Pupils are confident and self-assured. They enjoy taking responsibility. They recognise the need for them to become independent in order to be successful learners.
- Pupils know how to work well together. They can cooperate in a joint task or collaborate when solving a problem. When a pupil speaks in a lesson, the others listen respectfully.
- The school promotes pupils' awareness of equality well. Pupils learn about different beliefs, values and ways of life. They learn to understand and respect individuality and diversity. The school strongly promotes British values through its own principles and the personal, social, health and education (PSHE) curriculum.
- For pupils in key stages 3 and 4, there is a well-thought-out careers programme that helps them identify options for, and pathways to, their future careers. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Years 7 and 8 enjoyed a hands-on experience from a visiting organisation. This activity provided experience and information about careers in the science and technology sector.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and around the very large school site. They learn about the risks of online activity and are well supported to seek advice if they have any concerns when using the internet.
- Pupils have access to effective pastoral support if they are worried about anything. For younger pupils, this can be through talking to their class teacher or putting a note in the 'worry box'. Pupils in the secondary phase name adults to whom they could turn if needed. Staff follow up pupils' concerns with care; for example, when a pupil reports that they are being bullied. Staff work hard to get to the bottom of the matter, support the victim and help the bully to recognise the impact of their actions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school is a calm and orderly environment, despite the large number of pupils. Pupils move around the site sensibly. For example, even the very youngest know that they must line up quietly when going back into class from the playground.
- Pupils respect the school. For example, they wear the school's uniform correctly. They keep the school tidy by not dropping litter. They attend frequently. Attendance rates for all groups of pupils are high compared to the national average figures.
- Pupils follow instructions without question. They understand it is important to do so and they accept the consequences of choosing not to. However, some secondary pupils feel that teachers are too quick to administer detentions for very minor misdemeanours. They comply with the punishment but say that it feels disproportionate.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils across the school attain standards that are in line with those expected for their ages in a range of subjects. Given the low starting points of many, this shows that they make good progress.

- Pupils in key stage 1 achieve very well. Almost all pupils in Year 1 achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check. By the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been at least in line with the national average since the school opened. Standards are rising beyond this. A notable proportion of pupils are working beyond the typical standard expected for seven-year-olds.
- Pupils who are currently in key stage 2 are making strong progress. As a result, they are developing secure skills in reading, writing and mathematics. They also acquire knowledge across a wide range of subjects, such as science, history and geography. This is setting them up well for the transition to secondary schooling after they complete Year 6.
- Overall, pupils make good progress in the secondary phase. The standard of their work and the school's records of their progress show that most are on track to achieve the ambitious GCSE targets set for them. Pupils' progress varies a little between subjects, but there are no significant weaknesses.
- Most groups of pupils achieve equally well. Progress for some groups has improved since the school opened. For example, pupils with SEND now make better progress because of the effective support they receive. In most year groups, these pupils now achieve well.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving. Overall, their attainment is below that of other pupils nationally. However, they are catching up. The difference is diminishing. In key stage 2 it is now minimal in most year groups. The impact of the pupil premium funding is evident in key stage 3 where disadvantaged pupils are now making strong progress in many subjects.
- One group of pupils does not make as much progress as others as they move through the school. These are the pupils whose attainment was high at the end of key stages 1 and 2. These pupils have not achieved in some subjects as well as they might since the school opened. The picture is improving, but there is still more to be done. For example, high prior attainers make strong progress in mathematics in all key stages. Their progress in some other subjects is not as good as it should be.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years provision helps children get off to a good start in their schooling. They learn the routines and expectations of school life. They make good progress in their learning and achieve well.
- Children settle well into the Nursery and Reception classes because they feel secure. They form strong bonds with their teachers and key workers. They are safe, happy and interested in the activities on offer.
- Children learn how to follow the teacher's instructions, how to listen to each other, share, take turns and play together sensibly. As a result, the early years classrooms are enjoyable places to be.
- When they start school, many children have weak skills in comparison to typical three- or four-year-olds. For example, many struggle to manage their toileting needs. Most find it difficult to communicate, either in English or their first language, if different. Little by little, staff help them to overcome their barriers to learning. The strong

teaching children receive in the Nursery and Reception classes means that most reach the good level of development necessary to ensure that they are ready to start Year 1.

- Staff in the early years pay much attention to developing children's understanding of English and their ability to speak clearly, using full sentences. This helps them to overcome their communication difficulties and sets them up well to develop early reading and writing skills.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Children quickly learn about letters and the sounds they make. Children also use phonics confidently to have a go at spelling words when they write. During the inspection, inspectors saw some impressive writing by children in the early years.
- Children make good progress because teachers accurately assess what they already know and what they need to learn next. Teachers use this information to plan activities that captivate children's interest. As a result, children concentrate for long periods of time and refine their skills.
- Disadvantaged children achieve as well as their classmates. This is because leaders use the early years pupil premium to ensure that the provision meets these children's needs well.
- Staff in the early years work effectively with parents. This has a positive impact on children's well-being and on their progress. For example, staff and parents have worked together to reduce the number of children who still need to wear nappies when they come to school. Similarly, teachers have given parents helpful advice on how they can support their children to learn to read, even though they, themselves, might not speak English confidently. Parents are very grateful to the school for the help it gives them.
- Leadership of the early years is effective. Leaders know that, while there is much strong practice in the early years, there are still aspects that could be improved. For example, the quality of teaching varies, just a little, between classes and groups. Leaders are well placed to make sure that improvements that are needed do happen.

School details

Unique reference number	141752
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10048339

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 18 (pupils currently on roll are aged 3 to 15)
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1557
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	David Gould
Headteacher	Gail Peyton, executive principal
Telephone number	0121 289 3535
Website	www.arkvictoria.org
Email address	info@arkvictoria.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Ark Victoria Academy opened in September 2015 as an academy sponsored by the Ark Trust. Its predecessor school was a newly opened all-through school. When it opened, the school had pupils in the early years and Year 7 only. By July 2018, the school had pupils in early years, Years 1 and 2 and Years 7 to 9.
- In September 2018, following consultation, the school amalgamated with Ark Chamberlain Academy, a nearby junior school. Ark Chamberlain catered for pupils in Years 3 to 6. The two schools now share one site.
- The school is governed by the Ark Trust. Some governance functions are delegated to a local governing body.
- The school uses a provider called 'Work N Learn', to access alternative provision for pupils when needed. Only one pupil currently attends.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning by visiting lessons with senior leaders, looking at the work in pupils' book and talking to them about their learning. Inspectors also heard some pupils read.
- Inspectors carried out brief tours of the school to look at aspects of its work. They also visited an assembly and observed pupils at breaktimes.
- Inspectors met with: the executive principal, the primary and secondary headteachers, other school staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors spoke informally to other staff and pupils as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors took account of the 84 responses to the online survey, Parent View and the 49 free-text comments made by parents during the inspection. Inspectors spoke to other parents in the playground before and after school. Inspectors also took account of the 44 responses to the staff survey and the 96 submissions to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors examined number of documents, including: leaders' checks on how well the school is doing, their plans for improvement, minutes of meetings of the Ark Trust and the local governing body, and records relating to safeguarding, pupils' progress and attainment and their behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Sandy Hayes, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Michael Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Sally Noble	Ofsted Inspector
Patrick Amieli	Ofsted Inspector
Collette Higgins	Ofsted Inspector
Rob Hackfath	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Bassett	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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