

Ark William Parker Academy

Parkstone Road, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 2NT

Inspection dates

17–18 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Recent changes introduced by school leaders have set the school on the right path, but there is more work to do before standards are good.
- The quality of teaching is variable. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do and achieve, or do not routinely plan work that meets groups of pupils' needs.
- The work some teachers set for pupils, particularly the most able, is not challenging enough. When this happens, pupils frequently lose their concentration in lessons.
- The advice and guidance teachers give to pupils to improve their work does not help them effectively to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Up to now, pupils have not made enough progress from their starting points but there are signs that current pupils are beginning to do better.
- Some pupils do not routinely behave in an acceptable manner in lessons and around the school site. A few pupils, especially in the younger years, behave in a disrespectful way. Teachers do not manage poor behaviour consistently well.
- Attendance is slowly getting better but there are still too many pupils who do not come to school as regularly as they should. Their absence is affecting their learning and progress.
- The quality of provision in the sixth form is improving but students' progress has been affected by poor teaching in the past.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders, governors and members of the academy trust know what they need to do to improve standards. They are focusing on the right things and there are already encouraging signs of improvement.
- There is a growing sense of common purpose among staff and pupils to make the school a better place in which to learn.
- The school's innovative, professional development programme is sharpening teachers' skills and attracting and retaining good-quality staff.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils agree that the school is a safe place and that their well-being is given high priority.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment, to improve standards and progress, especially for disadvantaged pupils and the most able, by:
 - ensuring that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
 - ensuring that teachers plan work that better matches pupils' needs
 - giving pupils work that is challenging and makes them think hard
 - checking that there is greater consistency in the advice and guidance teachers give to pupils about how to improve their work, so that they deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding as a result
 - insisting on consistently high standards of behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - improving pupils' attendance
 - overseeing that the school's professional development programme for staff is rigorously monitored for its impact on pupils' learning and progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Progress since the last inspection was too slow at first, largely as a result of turbulent staffing, particularly at senior level. However, since the appointment of the new principal in September 2016, changes have been introduced which have halted the previously declining standards. While there is still significant work to be done, the school is now on a more stable footing.
- The principal, supported by her team of recently appointed senior leaders, has focused on the key things to make a difference. However, these changes, such as the introduction of a new curriculum, have not had time to impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- The quality of leadership across the school is inconsistent. Middle leaders, who play a key role in driving improvements forward, are being supported by senior staff to develop their leadership skills. However, the impact of their training is yet to be fully felt.
- Results from the parents' questionnaire and the falling roll show that some parents have lost confidence in the school. Part of the reason is due to the frequent changes of staff the school has experienced in recent times, leading to instability and a negative effect on pupils' continuity of learning. This legacy is still being felt, particularly by pupils in the older years.
- Positively, staffing is now much more stable. School leaders have a clear strategy for recruiting, training and retaining teachers which is beginning to work. Pupils told inspectors that they greatly appreciate having consistent teachers taking their classes.
- The academy trust, Ark, is providing specific support to help the school sustain the level of improvement required. For example, the recently appointed executive principal is bringing her expertise and guidance for two days per week. A team of Ark staff is coaching teachers in the classroom in key areas such as English, mathematics and science. This is helping to develop teachers' skills and build more solid foundations for the future.
- Senior leaders have worked swiftly to introduce greater clarity of purpose. Teachers say they are now much clearer about what they need to do and their role in making the school a better place. The 'Parker 5', which sets out the school's five key priorities for improvement, is well understood by all staff and has brought a sharper focus to the school's work.
- School leaders, governors and personnel from the trust are committed to the school and ambitious for its future. They have a sharp and accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have clear plans in place which are helping to accelerate the pace of improvement. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of their actions are thorough.

- Staff now have greater confidence in the school. They told inspectors that they feel senior leaders support them better and therefore morale is higher than in the past. They are held more stringently to account and fully understand that they must meet their performance targets to qualify for pay progression. Members of the governing body make sure that the performance management system is monitored effectively.
- The school's professional training programme is a key feature in helping teachers to develop their skills. In particular, staff new to the profession and the school greatly appreciate the opportunities they have to be coached by more experienced colleagues. Staff are also enthusiastic about the dedicated time they are given to plan lessons together. Although in their infancy, there are signs that these initiatives are helping pupils to make faster progress.
- School leaders are using pupil premium money and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding increasingly thoughtfully to help targeted pupils to learn better. Funds are being spent sensibly on improving the quality of teaching in the classroom and on specific interventions such as the Year 11 revision programme in English and mathematics. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make more progress towards catching up with their peers.
- Funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is being increasingly well spent on providing individual help for them. Leaders in this area of the school's work have an improving understanding of how to provide for these pupils' needs. During the inspection, inspectors saw examples of learning support assistants working effectively with pupils in class. Consequently, these pupils are making increasing progress from their starting points.
- School leaders recently reviewed the curriculum and made several changes. As a result, pupils now have access to a curriculum which is better suited to their needs and prepares them better for their future paths. For example, the number of pupils following the English Baccalaureate is increasing. The school makes relevant provision off-site for a small number of pupils for whom an alternative curriculum is more suitable.
- Pupils have opportunities to develop their wider skills through a range of extra-curricular activities in areas such as sport and the arts. Pupils are encouraged to participate in trips to the theatre to broaden their horizons. The range of sports is a particular strength.
- The school provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a good understanding of fundamental British values such as knowing right from wrong. The school's Christian ethos and values are evident throughout the school. Pupils reflect on them during tutor times and assemblies as well as through the taught curriculum. Current social issues are considered, such as information about how to stay safe online and in the street, as an inspector saw in a house assembly.
- Leaders understand that the school is on a path of improvement. They know that standards need to rise quickly, particularly for the disadvantaged and the most able pupils. They are taking decisive action to improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective.
- The vast majority of current governors are new to the governing body since the previous inspection. Membership is a mixture of Ark-appointed personnel, a parent and representatives from the diocese. All members have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the need to drive improvement forward quickly.
- The governing body is committed to the school, and its members bring a range of relevant skills and experience, such as in finance and business, to their discussions. Governors have an improving understanding of their role in driving improvement forward and are developing confidence to challenge school leaders.
- Governors fulfil their statutory duties effectively. They undertake regular training relating to areas such as radicalisation and oversee the school's work to keep pupils safe.
- Governors take decisions regarding teachers' pay in conjunction with school leaders. They make sure that pay rises are only awarded if teachers can demonstrate they have improved pupils' progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is a high priority within the school and record-keeping is thorough and methodical. Leaders have made sure that staff and governors are, as required, trained in keeping pupils safe from risks such as radicalisation and female genital mutilation.
- School staff with dedicated responsibilities for safeguarding are visible and constantly available. They work closely with outside agencies, ensuring that referrals are made in a timely way to get pupils and their families the help they need. Pupils and parents have confidence in the school's ability to keep pupils safe. Leaders have checked that there are frequent opportunities for pupils to learn about keeping themselves safe in a variety of contexts.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is variable across the school. This inconsistency is hindering some pupils, especially the disadvantaged and the most able, from making the progress they should.
- Pupils are not consistently provided with work which is challenging enough and makes them think hard to improve the quality of their answers. As a result, pupils, especially in the younger years, lose interest in lessons and behave inappropriately, disrupting their own and their peers' learning.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve are not consistently high, resulting in a lack of suitable work, provided over time, to meet groups of pupils' different needs. Consequently, learning and progress slows down.

- A scrutiny of pupils' books showed that the advice and guidance teachers give pupils to improve their work does not always follow the school's policy. Teachers do not routinely correct pupils' misunderstandings, or deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding to push them onto a higher level. Teachers do not always insist that pupils act on the advice they are given, which is a missed opportunity to learn from their mistakes.
- Not all teachers set homework as often as the school's policy sets out. Some pupils do not take the completion of homework seriously enough so they are missing out on opportunities to develop their learning further.
- Where pupils make more rapid progress, such as in English, science and languages, teachers use a variety of ways to gain pupils' interest in their learning. They plan effectively and use different styles of questions to test pupils' understanding. They have high expectations and set pupils challenging work to do, such as writing in an extended way using high-level language. For example, in a Year 11 English class pupils used their imagination to write a high-quality piece to describe a post-apocalyptic experience. This challenging activity led to rapid learning and progress.
- Leaders, rightly, are making reading a high priority because many pupils have weak literacy skills. Pupils read silently in tutor time every week and have access to a welcoming library. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy reading and recognise how it helps them to write more fluently.
- Teachers' very regular assessment of pupils' learning and progress in every subject is regularly checked for consistency and accuracy. This system is helping school leaders to keep a much closer eye on pupils' progress and intervene more quickly if they are falling behind.
- The school gives parents regular information on their sons' progress. School staff offer parents training in how to understand the assessment model so they can support their children's learning better.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The focus on developing pupils' self-reflection is not yet making a difference to those pupils who are not interested in learning. Too many pupils are not taking enough responsibility for the impact of their behaviour on their own learning or that of others.
- Parents who responded to the questionnaire are not convinced that the school's expectations for behaviour are high enough. They are not confident that pupils are looked after well enough, though they do feel their children are safe in school.
- Relationships in the school are strong and inspectors saw many examples of positive interactions between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves.

- Teachers know their pupils and their families well. The recently restructured house system has improved communication between school and home. House staff are better able to support pupils pastorally and follow-up work is faster and more targeted. However, it is too soon to see the full benefits of these changes on pupils' learning and progress.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school and parents support this view. Pupils say that bullying is dealt with and they know who to go to for help. They appreciate the advice and guidance they receive on how to identify dangers and keep themselves safe from threats such as online bullying.
- School leaders are gradually increasing the number of ways that pupils have to develop their leadership skills. For example, pupils can contribute to decisions made by the school council and plans are in place to develop house leaders.
- Leaders have ensured that there is increasingly effective provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance. The trust provides support for pupils in this regard, beginning early on in Year 7. Year 11 pupils have one-to-one careers advice from a dedicated adviser. The guidance pupils receive prepares them well for their future path in education, training or employment.
- School leaders keep a close eye on the personal development and welfare of pupils educated in off-site provision. They are in regular contact with staff at the alternative institutions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' behaviour is variable across the school. While some behave in a respectful way, others do not. Staff fail to tackle poor behaviour in a consistently effective way.
- Inspectors witnessed some incidents of disrespectful and defiant conduct by a few pupils around the school site. A high number of staff are required to be on duty because pupils are not consistently managing their own behaviour in an acceptable way.
- The majority of pupils arrive punctually to school and lessons. However, some are tardy between classes and so interrupt lessons when they arrive late.
- Permanent exclusions are above the national average, though fixed-term exclusions are dropping because the school has introduced a more rigorous behaviour code which is starting to work. Pupils say that behaviour has improved in the recent past.
- Many pupils are polite and courteous. They engage willingly with visitors and are helpful and articulate.
- Pupils are generally respectful of the classrooms and grounds and keep them free from litter. They are smartly dressed and respond well to the school's expectation of high standards of personal presentation.

- Attendance overall is below the national average, including for those who are persistently absent. However, in both measures, there has been recent improvement. This includes for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, whose attendance has been particularly low in the past.
- Attendance is a higher priority in the school and processes to follow up absences are increasingly thorough. Vulnerable pupils' attendance is a top priority and school staff make regular phone calls to targeted families or make home visits to be sure that pupils who are not in school are safe.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site alternative provision where they are following courses better adapted to their needs. School staff liaise closely with off-site providers to monitor these pupils' attendance, behaviour and progress. Pupils' outcomes in these alternative settings are in line with pupils in school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- A high proportion of pupils join the school with attainment well below that found nationally. Over time, pupils have made much less progress than they should from their starting points in a range of subjects.
- A legacy of weak teaching and turbulent staffing has been detrimental to pupils' learning and progress. While this situation is now a great deal better, pupils have a lot of ground to make up, particularly those in Years 10 and 11.
- Provisional information about the 2017 Year 11 GCSE results shows that there was improvement in pupils' progress in several subjects, although standards were still below where they should be. The most able pupils, in particular, did not make as much progress as others in the year group.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in both English and mathematics was higher than the previous year, showing that better teaching is starting to speed up pupils' progress.
- Current pupils in the school are beginning to benefit from more stable staffing and specialist subject teachers. A scrutiny of current pupils' work showed that, in all years and in a range of subjects, the majority are making improving progress. The school's own assessment information confirms this.
- Current pupils in key stage 3 are making more progress than those in key stage 4 because there are still significant gaps in the older pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. School leaders are addressing this through extra examination practice for Year 11 pupils. This is starting to make a difference.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress has been particularly weak in the past. However, this group of pupils did better in 2017 as a result of targeted interventions. Current disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress than in the past, due to better quality teaching and a focus on addressing these pupils' individual barriers to learning.
- The rates of progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have increased because their needs are being better met increasingly well. Teachers have had more training in how to cater for this group of pupils and new leadership in this area of the school's work is ensuring that these pupils' progress speeds up.

- The school's systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress are now more robust and timely than in the past. Teachers are swifter to provide help for pupils falling behind, which is helping them to catch up with other pupils more quickly.
- Many pupils arrive at the school with weak literacy skills which school leaders are working hard to address. The reading initiative and a focus on developing pupils' writing skills are beginning to make inroads.
- Pupils receive effective guidance to help them to prepare for the next stage of their learning. As a result, all pupils progressed into education, training or employment last year.
- School leaders recognise that there is still some way to go before all pupils are making the progress they should. Disadvantaged pupils and the most able are particular focus groups because their rates of progress are slower than others'.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Over time, students in the sixth form have not made expected progress because they have had too many gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding from weaker teaching further down the school.
- In the past, students have not been guided onto the right courses for them so some did not finish their courses of study or achieve relevant or useful qualifications
- Teaching in the sixth form on the Ark William Parker Academy site is variable. Some lacks challenge and is not planned with enough care to meet the needs of different learners in the class.
- Enrichment opportunities for students to develop their wider skills have been limited up to now. The same is true of leadership opportunities, which have been restricted to membership of the school council. Last year, students did not have access to work experience, though this situation has been resolved for current students.
- Changes over the past year have put the sixth form on a firmer footing. While initiatives have yet to make a real difference to current students' learning and progress, there is evidence of some improvement which demonstrates capacity for the future.
- Outcomes in 2017 were better for Year 12 than for Year 13 due to better teaching, and students being on the right courses. The proportion of students staying on into Year 13 from Year 12 was higher than the previous year and above the national average.
- Very few students retook GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics last year. Those that did made progress in English but not in mathematics.
- New leadership of the sixth form and closer collaboration with Ark Helenswood Academy is breathing new life into this area of the school. The development of shared communication and ownership across subject and pastoral leaders is strengthening accountability.
- Leaders' work is supported by Ark staff. Frequent planning and monitoring meetings across the shared sixth form are beginning to generate more consistency of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Relationships in the sixth form are positive. Students feel safe and value the advice and guidance they receive from tutors. They enjoy their sixth-form life and attend well. They told inspectors that they felt well supported and informed when making their course choices.
- The curriculum has been reviewed to offer a better range of courses, both academic and vocational, to meet learners' needs and starting points. As a result, students are now following courses that match their aspirations and prepare them better for their next steps.
- The quality of careers information, advice and guidance for students leaving Year 13 is a great deal better than in the past. As a result, there has been more success in learners securing places at top universities and entering apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	139821
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10032899

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 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	702
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	69 boys
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Clifford Smith
Principal	Stephanie Newman
Telephone number	01424 439 888
Website	http://arkwilliamparkeracademy.org/
Email address	info@arkwilliamparker.org
Date of previous inspection	8–9 July 2015

Information about this school

- 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.
- Ark William Parker Academy is a smaller-than-average boys' school. The sixth form is shared with the neighbouring girls' school, Ark Helenswood Academy. The current principal has been in post since September 2016.

- The school sponsor is the Ark multi-academy trust (MAT). The regional director of the MAT provides support for the school for one day per week. An executive principal was appointed to the school in September 2017 and provides support for the school for one to two days per week.
- The school currently uses two alternative providers, Sussex Coast College, and Teaching and Learning Provision (TLP), to provide alternative education for a small number of pupils in key stage 4.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- About a third of pupils in the school are eligible for support from the pupil premium (additional government funding), which is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.
- The school did not meet the government's current floor standards in 2016, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress from key stage 2 to key stage 4.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 52 parts of lessons, 13 of them jointly with senior leaders. They also visited an assembly and several form-time sessions.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work in books. Inspectors also examined a selection of pupils' books in key stages 3, 4 and the sixth form, with school leaders, to give a broader picture of progress over time.
- Inspectors held regular meetings with senior leaders and with a range of staff, including newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school. Inspectors also spoke informally to many staff.
- The lead inspector met with those responsible for governance and with the regional director of Ark.
- Inspectors took account of the 46 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the comments which 29 of them wrote. One parent also sent comments directly to Ofsted. There were no responses to the staff questionnaire or the pupil questionnaire. Pupils' views were gathered through the school's own pupil surveys and through meetings with groups of pupils from Years 7 to 13.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of school information. This included the school's website, evaluation of its performance and plan for improvement, information about standards and progress, logs about behaviour and attendance, as well as a range of policies.

Inspection team

Paula Sargent, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Lee	Ofsted Inspector
Harry Ingham	Ofsted Inspector
Victoria Kirby	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Swan	Ofsted Inspector

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