

Ark Little Ridge Primary Academy

Little Ridge Avenue, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN37 7LR

Inspection dates

9–10 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership and management of the school are exceptionally strong. This strength is seen in leadership at all levels. As a result, the school has improved markedly since the academy opened. There is excellent capacity to improve further.
- Leaders make effective use of the strong support provided by the Ark academy trust. Staff share good practice from within the school. They also work closely with colleagues from the partner school in the federation. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good.
- While teaching is typically good, leaders recognise the need to continue to share good practice across the school so that teaching supports achievement at the highest levels.
- Safeguarding procedures are rigorous. Pupils feel safe in this inclusive, welcoming atmosphere.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good. Pupils are polite. They are proud of their work and their school.
- While the rate of attendance has improved overall, the absence rate for some pupils remains too high.
- In 2016, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who reached the expected standard in the combined reading, writing and mathematics measure was above the national average.
- As a result of the improvement in the quality of teaching, all groups of pupils currently in the school make good progress in a wide range of subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils in the speech and language unit are taught well and make good progress.
- Teachers know their pupils well. Lessons are interesting and pitched well to meet pupils' needs.
- Governors, well supported by the trust, make a significant contribution to the school's ongoing improvement. They provide effective challenge to school leaders.
- Children get off to an excellent start in the early years, where teaching is outstanding. As a result, children are very well prepared for Year 1.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Share the existing strengths in teaching across the school so that it becomes outstanding and pupils make even better progress.
- Further improve the attendance of all groups of pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leadership in the school is inspirational. The executive principal leads with a steely determination to make sure that pupils achieve as well as they can. Her exceptionally clear vision and relentless resolve has transformed the school since her appointment. Leaders, governors and staff share her ambitious aspirations. As a result, the school is very well-placed to improve further.
- Leaders at all levels are highly skilled and work very effectively together. Middle leaders receive excellent training which enables them to contribute fully to school improvement. They play an important role in improving the quality of teaching. They make frequent checks on the quality of teaching and give good support to staff when needed.
- Leaders support and develop teachers' skills and expertise extremely well. Leaders know the strengths in each teacher's practice and the aspects which could be improved. Training and support is sharply targeted to meet individual teachers' needs. Effective use is made of the training opportunities provided by the Ark academy trust as well as from within the school. There is an open culture in which teachers feel confident to talk about their practice. Staff value the opportunities provided to work with colleagues in the partner school, Ark Blacklands Primary Academy. Teachers who are new to the profession are given extremely good support. Morale is high. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving rapidly.
- Leaders have established rigorous systems for checking pupils' achievement. Frequent meetings are held with teachers to discuss how well each pupil is learning. In this way, leaders know the progress of individual pupils from their different starting points. Leaders share a determination to make sure that all pupils achieve well, no matter what barriers to learning they may have. Appropriate action is taken to provide additional support to pupils who need it. This has resulted in improved progress for all groups, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to support their learning and progress. As a result, their achievement has improved since the academy opened.
- Funds for primary sports and physical education have also been used wisely and successfully, for example, to improve teachers' skills in teaching physical education. Joining the local sports partnership has increased pupils' participation in competitive sports.
- A very few parents who added comments to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said they were concerned that learning is not made to be fun. This view was not borne out by the inspection. Pupils say that they enjoy the interesting activities which help them to learn.
- A revised curriculum was introduced in January 2017. It has been designed to provide a strong foundation in English and mathematics skills while providing interesting activities to motivate pupils to learn. The inspection found that, although only recently introduced, the curriculum is achieving its aims and supporting pupils' good progress and enjoyment of a wide range of subjects. Pupils speak enthusiastically about trips

that link to the termly topics, for example visiting an art museum and building models from 'junk' found on the beach and visiting a local castle.

- Exciting activities are designed to capture pupils' interests. For example, Year 3 pupils grew herbs and cooked pasta as part of their 'hunters and gatherers' history topic. Year 1 pupils constructed a giant lighthouse after reading 'The lighthouse keeper's lunch'. A recent 'design and technology day' involved pupils in designing and making mobile phone covers, cooking a 'Willy Wonka' chocolate cake or making a marble run. Pupils enjoy taking part in the extra-curricular clubs, such as cricket and dance. These types of activities make learning fun and promote pupils' good academic, physical and personal development.
- British values are promoted extremely well, particularly through the school's 'Ridge values' of rigour, integrity, determination, generosity and enthusiasm. Pupils happily contribute to school life by being prefects, helping each other in lessons, acting as 'ambassadors' for visitors or volunteering to collect litter from the school grounds. Pupils are rewarded for demonstrating these values, for example with merit badges in assembly. Pupils particularly enjoy these achievement assemblies, which help to promote high expectations. This was typified by a pupil who said, 'When I see somebody getting a reward, I look at them as a role model'.
- Parent View, and discussions with parents during the inspection, show that the large majority of parents fully support the school. Typical comments included: 'The school has massively improved'; 'My daughter thoroughly enjoys school and looks forward to it every day' and 'I have nothing but praise for the school.'

Governance of the school

- Governors play an active role in supporting the school's ongoing improvement. They share leaders' aspirations and are committed to delivering an exceptional standard of education.
- Governors know the school well. They visit the school regularly and ask school leaders challenging questions, for example about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Governors talk to pupils to check the impact of policies on everyday practice. These types of activities give governors good insight into the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning and well-being.
- Governors make sure that pay increases for the leaders and teachers are linked to performance. They carry out their statutory duties extremely well.
- The Ark academy trust provides very effective support to governors and school leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Thorough checks are made on employees and visitors. Staff receive appropriate and timely training which reflects the most recent legislation and guidance. Staff know what to do if they have safeguarding concerns.

- Leaders make sure that pupils are safe in school. The school is a very welcoming place where the well-being of pupils is seen, rightly, as a high priority. Leaders are acutely aware of pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Staff work closely with health and other professionals to provide pupils and their families with extra guidance and support where it is needed.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View agree that their child is kept safe at school. Pupils feel safe because staff work well together to promote a culture of safety and care.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching has improved markedly since the academy opened and is now good.
- Classrooms are bright and inviting places in which to learn. Pupils refer to the useful prompts on display to help them learn. Displays around the school celebrate pupils' work and help to promote the high expectations that teachers have of all pupils.
- Teachers use their understanding of what pupils can do to match work precisely to the needs of groups of pupils in their class. The most able pupils are challenged to think and work hard, for example when solving fraction puzzles in mathematics or when justifying their views about a character in a book. Teaching assistants give good support to lower-attaining pupils which allows them to be successful when tackling tasks. Well-trained specialist staff provide good support to pupils in the speech and language unit which enables them to make good progress.
- Reading is taught well. Pupils read every day. The school environment promotes reading as being important and enjoyable. The teaching of phonics is effective so that pupils have the strategies they need to read. The most able pupils enjoy the challenge of appropriately demanding books. Less confident readers are given extra help so they can catch up.
- The teaching of writing is effective. Pupils are encouraged to talk about their writing, often sharing their ideas with a partner. Linking writing to the curriculum, such as writing a newspaper report about a flood, writing a biography of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole, or compiling a report following a residential visit, motivates pupils to write increasingly extended pieces.
- Teachers have benefited from the expert support from the trust. As a result, the teaching of mathematics is good. Pupils are given good opportunities to talk about their mathematical thinking and deepen their understanding.
- Although teaching is typically good, some inconsistency remains. The very effective practice in some classes has not yet been shared fully across the school.

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 proud of their school. They develop self-confidence in this nurturing, supportive environment. Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Pupils show respect to adults. They play and learn cooperatively.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves healthy. Pupils enjoy using the equipment at playtimes which helps to keep them active.
- Pupils feel safe. They learn how to keep themselves safe, both in and out of school, for example when visiting the nearby coast or when using the internet.
- Staff place a high emphasis on promoting pupils' emotional well-being. Relationships are strong across the school. Pupils feel they can talk to an adult if they have worries.
- Pupils understand that bullying is wrong. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that adults deal with any incidents of unkindness that occur. School records confirm this view.
- The breakfast and after-school club provide a safe, welcoming place for pupils to play and be with their friends outside of school time.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are proud of their school. They wear their uniform with pride. They present their work neatly. Most pupils conduct themselves sensibly in lessons and around the school.
- Staff have a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour and deal with it well. The large majority of parents who responded to Parent View agree that behaviour is well managed. Pupils whose behaviour is not good enough are well supported in the newly introduced 'thrive' room. Early signs are that this is improving the behaviour of a few pupils, although it is too early to fully evaluate its impact.
- Overall, attendance has improved. However, the absence rate of some pupils remains too high. Well-considered strategies are in place to tackle this but leaders know that attendance continues to be an area to improve.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' achievement across the school has improved since the academy opened and is now good. Work in pupils' books, and the school's own tracking system, show that, from their different starting points, most pupils currently in school are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are also making good progress in a range of other subjects. For example, pupils developed their scientific understanding by investigating chemical changes in chocolate alongside their study of 'Charlie and the chocolate factory'. Year 4 pupils developed a better understanding of history when they constructed a giant pharaoh as part of their Egypt topic. During the inspection, pupils in the speech and language unit were excited to stroke a lamb to learn more about the world around them, while at the same time practising words to describe the sensation.
- The proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check in 2015 and 2016 were higher than the national figures because of the very effective

teaching in Reception and Year 1. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 were higher than the national averages.

- In 2016, pupils accelerated their progress in Year 6 so that by the end of the year, the proportion reaching the expected standard in the combined reading, writing and mathematics measure was above the national average.
- Leaders' work to diminish the difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally is proving to be successful. Across the school, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are working at age-related expectations is increasing. This is because teachers and teaching assistants provide good support to make sure disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as possible.
- Teachers have, rightly, increased the level of challenge for the most able pupils, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers have high expectations of the most able pupils and, as a result, their achievement has improved since the academy opened and is now good.
- Pupils in the speech and language unit make good progress because the curriculum is adapted to meet their individual needs. Pupils elsewhere in the school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress because of the effective support they receive from teachers and well-trained teaching assistants.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The leadership of the early years is highly effective. As a result, the early years provides an exceptionally strong start to children's school life. It is the strongest part of the school because the teaching is consistently highly effective across both classes.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been above the national average since the academy opened. This demonstrates rapid gains from children's different starting points. As a result, children are very well prepared for Year 1.
- Children currently in the early years are making exceptionally strong progress. In daily phonics and writing sessions, they make rapid gains in their reading and writing skills. Children's early mathematical skills are developed very well in daily, well-structured, mathematics sessions.
- Staff provide excellent support for all children, including the most able and those pupils who find learning difficult. Additional funding for disadvantaged children is used well. Excellent support, from adults in school as well as from experts from outside, is given to children who need extra help.
- Activities are carefully chosen which provide stimulating opportunities for children to explore ideas and excite their appetite for learning. For example, when exploring life cycles, children enjoyed reading 'The very hungry caterpillar' to each other, examined tadpoles using magnifying glasses, made frogs with card and wrote subtraction stories about frogs. During the inspection, children were keen to complete 'hire forms' to borrow construction equipment in the 'building area'. This is a typical example of how children learn to write in an exciting, real-life context.

- Staff know each child very well. Adults assess children’s learning accurately through appropriate questioning and observation. Children’s progress is both checked and recorded carefully.
- Strong links are made with parents; they are encouraged to contribute to their child’s learning record. Parents spoken to during the inspection were unanimous in their appreciation of how well their child had been welcomed into the school. Typical comments included, ‘I was rather anxious about my son starting school, but the school has made the whole process very easy and enjoyable.’
- Adults promote the development of children’s social skills very well. Children spoke to inspectors with confidence, demonstrating good listening skills and politeness to adults. Children behave extremely well, playing happily together. As a result, all children are enthusiastic and keen to join in all the activities.
- Children are safe and well cared for in this exceptionally well-managed environment. As a result, children flourish.

School details

Unique reference number	141022
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10032506

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	417
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Micky Sandall
Executive principal	Lorraine Clarke
Telephone number	01424 752266
Website	www.arklittleridgeprimary.org
Email address	info@arklittleridgeprimary.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

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.
- The school became a member of the Ark academy trust in September 2014.
- The school is federated with Ark Blacklands Primary Academy. The executive principal leads both schools and there is a single local governing body. The schools share a leader for inclusion.
- There have been significant changes in the senior leadership of the school. The executive principal joined in January 2016, with the head of school and the assistant headteacher joining later in the year.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.

- Children in the early years are taught in two full-time Reception classes.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for 16 pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan relating to speech and/or language difficulties. There are currently 11 pupils enrolled.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club which are managed by the local governing board.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors evaluated learning across the school. Many lessons were visited jointly with the head of school, the assistant headteacher or the inclusion manager.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils' work for the current year to inform their judgements about pupils' progress, attainment and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Inspectors talked to groups of pupils about their learning and their experiences of school life. Inspectors listened to pupils read and observed pupils at lunch and during playtime.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers in their first year of teaching, governors, a representative from the Ark academy trust and a lead teacher from the trust.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents gathered from the 102 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also had conversations with parents at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including the school's own information about how well pupils are achieving, the school's checks on the quality of teaching and the school development plan.
- A review of safeguarding records and procedures was also carried out.

Inspection team

Joanna Toulson, lead inspector	Ofsted inspector
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Simon Yates	Ofsted inspector
Rosie Beattie	Ofsted inspector

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