

Ark Charter Academy

Hyde Park Road, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 4HL

Inspection dates

30 November – 1 December 2016

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils enter the school with below-average levels of attainment and by the end of Year 11, pupils' outcomes are well above national averages.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have maintained their determination to provide an excellent education for their pupils. The school has achieved national awards in recognition of the progress made by pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.
- Senior and middle leadership is strong. Subject leaders know how well pupils are achieving in their subjects. They are focused well on what their pupils need to learn next and they effectively challenge and support staff to improve pupils' achievement.
- There is a strong culture of learning and an eagerness to be even better across the school. Pupils are keen to acquire knowledge and skills and teachers are very willing to refine and improve their practice.
- Staff strongly support the leaders' vision to promote the achievement and well-being of every pupil. They are ambitious for their pupils.
- The school has good opportunities to collaborate with other schools in the Ark trust. Pupils and teachers benefit from this engagement because good practice is shared.
- Teaching is effective and teachers plan interesting and enjoyable lessons which help pupils achieve well. However, teaching does not consistently provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate curiosity and a desire to learn for themselves.
- The most able pupils have not achieved as well as other pupils. However, the standard of work of current most-able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, is improving.
- Strong relationships between staff and pupils help to keep pupils safe and promote their personal development well.
- The school's leadership is in transition since the founding principal left in the summer. The leadership team was reduced last year and is still not at full strength. This contributed to some slippage in the standard of behaviour, and levels of attendance, which are now being addressed by the interim principal.
- The sixth form requires improvement. It opened in September 2014 offering an academic curriculum, and students have not achieved high grades. Only about half of the students who started in 2014 and 2015 continued their A-level courses into Year 13. Suitable steps have now been taken to broaden the curriculum and provide more support for students, which have had a positive effect.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers challenge pupils to think deeply, particularly the most able.
- Embed leaders' work to improve attendance, especially for pupils who are persistently absent.
- Eliminate the remaining low-level disruption in lessons.
- Strengthen students' performance in academic subjects in the sixth form.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the last inspection, the school has achieved accolades for its success in raising educational outcomes for pupils, through its high expectations and aspirations for the young people of Portsmouth. The school was recognised as the most improved secondary school over a three-year period, achieved the Educational Outcomes Award in 2014 for exceptional student progress, and in 2015 won both the Outstanding Progress Award (Education Business Awards) and the National Pupil Premium Award.
- The interim principal and two vice-principals show relentless determination to continue to improve the school. During the last academic year, the leadership team was reduced, as two senior vice-principals were seconded elsewhere. Despite the valiant efforts of the remaining senior leaders, the pace of school improvement slowed. Nevertheless, overall strong progress by the end of Year 11 was sustained under the leadership of the highly effective founding principal. She left her post in the summer of 2016.
- In September 2016, one of the seconded senior vice-principals returned as interim principal. Aply supported by the two vice-principals, he has set out to reinstate the previously high standards of behaviour and attendance, which slipped last year. Staff welcome the collaborative approach shown by the new leadership team, for example the provision of two hours a week to enable joint planning and sharing good practice.
- Throughout the school, staff are hard-working and committed to ensuring that pupils thrive, feel safe and achieve well. Leaders have created a culture of learning among the staff, who are keen to improve their skills. Staff feel well supported and appreciate the range of professional development opportunities, including training and coaching by Ark specialists. Newly qualified teachers are particularly well supported.
- The academy trust, Ark, have successfully identified talented individuals and coached them to become capable leaders, thereby increasing the capacity to lead further improvements. Senior and middle leaders have a good insight into the strengths and areas for further development in the school, and are setting out to address weaknesses. Leadership of English, mathematics and humanities is particularly strong. However, the effectiveness of subject leadership across the school is hampered by the difficulty they experience in recruiting high-quality staff, particularly in science, English and computing.
- Leaders have introduced a new motto, known as 'the Three As': 'Aspiration for all; Achievement for all; Active Participation for all'. The Three As underpin the school improvement plan and staff performance management, which focus on cultural change. As a result, success criteria and accountability measures lack precision regarding the progress of groups of pupils, particularly the most able. Leaders have not prioritised clearly the need to increase the progress made by the most able pupils, including the disadvantaged most able, to the same high levels as other pupils.
- The school is inclusive and all staff understand the importance of providing extra support for pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, the use of the additional funding provided for these pupils is allocated carefully and is having a positive impact, as the standards are rising for these key groups.

- The curriculum is a strength of the school at key stages 3 and 4. It has been adapted to support the needs of the pupils better. For example, Year 7 pupils arriving at the school who are below expected levels participate in a 'fresh start' programme to provide extra support. If the pupils have not caught up, this provision continues into Year 8. In key stage 4, almost all pupils are studying a modern foreign language and most are studying a humanities subject. This is designed to increase the proportion of pupils achieving well in subjects which comprise the English Baccalaureate and thus increase their opportunities for further and higher education. The sixth-form curriculum has not been well suited to students' starting points and a vocational pathway has now been added to the predominantly academic curriculum. Across the school, the curriculum is supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, trips and inspirational visitors. Pupils spoke highly of these opportunities and experiences.
- The school works effectively to promote equality of opportunity. It celebrates diversity within the school and makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, based around its Christian ethos. Pupils have access to independent careers advice. These provisions go a long way to preparing pupils for their next step in education, employment and training. However, by the end of Year 11, pupils are not consistently equipped with the resilience and skills necessary for the academic rigour of A levels and beyond. Ark trust and school leaders realise that their high ambitions for pupils will not necessarily be met unless teaching changes to enable pupils to learn for themselves more effectively.
- A low proportion of parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Of those who did respond, over 9 out of ten would recommend the school to other parents. The school is oversubscribed for admission places into Year 7.

Governance of the school

- Governance is a strength of the school. Governors are rightly proud of the school's sustained success in enabling pupils at the school to achieve well, overall, from low starting points. They stress the importance of inspiring others by demonstrating what can be achieved by the young people of Portsmouth.
- The governing body, led by an astute chair of governors, makes a very effective contribution to the overall leadership of the school. Governors are aware of the school's strengths and also areas which could be improved. They are ambitious for the school and the local community.
- The local governing body works in partnership with Ark trust officers to challenge and support school leaders effectively. Both parties acknowledge that last year the pace of improvement stalled, although pupils' outcomes remained strong at GCSE.
- Following the school's previous success in the use of pupil premium funding to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils, governors have not continued to monitor the spending of this expenditure closely. Similarly, the use of funds specifically allocated to ensure that Year 7 pupils catch up by improving their literacy and numeracy skills has not been thoroughly evaluated.
- Governors have ensured that pay increases for teachers are only awarded when staff are effective in their work, including securing good achievement among pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders' emphasis on pupil well-being has ensured a culture of safeguarding which pervades the school community. Safeguarding systems and practices are secure. Statutory procedures for checking staff suitability to work with children are efficiently managed. Staff have good communication with parents, should they be worried about a pupil. Parents commented positively about the support their children received and the schools' level of communication. Pupils reported school staff deal effectively with any concern raised.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers are enthusiastic and very hard-working. They have high expectations and provide tasks that interest pupils and encourage them to acquire knowledge and practise new skills. In most lessons, clear routines and strong relationships between staff and pupils build high levels of trust and pupils participate confidently. The standard of work achieved by pupils is generally high.
- Overall, lessons are well managed and purposeful. Collaborative planning between teachers helps to provide a consistency of approach which helps pupils learn securely. A range of activities enables pupils to maintain concentration and cover a lot of content. Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, skilful questioning checks pupils' understanding and tackles misconceptions effectively. In most lessons, pupils are attentive because the work is stimulating and well structured.
- Teachers know their pupils thoroughly. They regularly check their pupils' progress through frequent assessments. There are examples of very effective feedback to pupils in line with the school's expectations. In these instances, pupils clearly understand what they have to do to improve and act upon this feedback. However, there are some instances when the frequent assessment is not being used fully to help teachers plan the next steps in pupils' learning. In a few cases, pupils are not acting on the useful feedback given to improve their work.
- Occasionally, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not consistently check how well pupils are learning before setting the next task. Sometimes, the most able pupils have to wait for others to catch up before going on to more challenging tasks and so do not make as much progress as they are capable of. At other times, pupils are presented with challenging tasks which they are not yet equipped to tackle, or moved on too quickly, before they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the basics.
- In most lessons, pupils are fully committed to learning. They settle quickly and know what to expect, due to the consistency of delivery across the school. In a few instances, low-level disruption slows progress. Most teachers use the behaviour policy consistently and they report that pupils' behaviour in lessons is improving.
- Teaching assistants offer skilful questioning to help pupils who require additional support to work things out for themselves. This is promoting better progress for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Even when teaching is promoting good progress, teachers do not consistently take the time to develop pupils' understanding further. Most pupils show a real keenness to

learn and yet sometimes do not have the opportunity to discuss their ideas and challenge each other's thinking. As a result, the most able pupils are not fully stretched and pupils miss the chance to articulate and develop their ideas more deeply before teachers move them onto their written tasks.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Teachers and pastoral leaders have created a caring environment with high expectations. They know pupils well, respond in a timely manner to any concerns and maintain contact with parents as much as possible.
- Pupils are rightly proud of their school and speak with passion about its inclusive nature and the way it 'gives everyone a chance'. They like the way teachers challenge any derogatory language and promote equality, especially in assemblies and tutor times.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school and online and know who to turn to if they have a concern. They report that on the few occasions bullying takes place, they are confident that it will be dealt with adequately. Pastoral staff, including the year learning managers, are alert to difficulties faced by pupils and offer effective support.
- Pupils say they find personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and tutor sessions about aspects of modern life such as emotional health and well-being useful. This well-structured programme supports pupils' personal development and welfare in and out of school effectively.
- Pupils receive impartial and useful careers, information and guidance to support their next stage of development. Pupils enjoy learning about their various options and appreciate the work of staff to raise their ambitions. Pupils are inspired by the school's sixth formers becoming the first in their families to attend university.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. The school tracks their attendance and progress regularly, working with these providers and other external agencies to ensure that the personalised programmes support the pupils effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good overall. The vast majority of pupils are polite and show consideration for others. They are punctual to lessons, fully equipped and are ready to get on with their learning as soon as they arrive. The majority of pupils are keen and attentive in class.
- The atmosphere around the school is convivial. Pupils socialise sensibly and are keen to tell visitors how much they enjoy school. Pupils are increasingly confident and self-assured.
- Towards the end of last year, there was some slippage in the previously high standards of conduct around the school and behaviour in lessons. Since September, the interim principal has led a robust response, and standards of behaviour have improved, although are not yet as high as leaders and pupils wish. Inspectors saw a few lessons disrupted by a small number of pupils, and plans are underway to reinstate a provision in school to help pupils manage their behaviour better.

- Pupils' attendance fell last year, but since September it has improved to just below the national average. Staff have used a range of strategies to enable pupils to attend school more regularly, including picking them up in a minibus. Leaders are working effectively to help pupils and parents have a clear understanding of the negative impact of absence on their progress. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains above national levels, although it is reducing rapidly.
- The level of exclusions has reduced, which is contributing to improved attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils start Year 7 with attainment significantly lower than national averages. In the 2014 and 2015 examinations, the proportion of Year 11 pupils attaining five GCSE at grades A* to C, including in English and mathematics, was well above national averages. Provisional 2016 GCSE results indicate that pupils' progress in a range of subjects is well above national levels. Overall, disadvantaged pupils make better progress than other pupils nationally, with the same starting points. These results represent strong achievement, which has been sustained over time.
- Provisional 2016 results show that the progress made by Year 11 pupils in both English and mathematics is in the top 10% of pupils nationally. This also applies to disadvantaged pupils in mathematics. High outcomes in these core subjects has been a feature of the school for the last three years.
- Current pupils make good progress. Pupils' work and the school's assessment information demonstrates little difference between the achievement of pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are not.
- In 2015, and provisionally in 2016, pupils with low and middle starting points made particularly good progress. In both years, pupils with the highest starting points, the most able pupils, made progress in line with others nationally. Although the most able pupils have been a lower-performing group for a couple of years, school leaders have not focused on their performance in school improvement plans. Nevertheless, subject leaders have sought to improve further the standard of work achieved by the most able, including disadvantaged most-able pupils. Work in books shows some early impact, with increasing challenge evident, and there was a small increase in the proportion of A and A* GCSE grades achieved in 2016. However, there is more to be done, particularly in science, languages and humanities and also to meet the increased rigour of new courses in English and mathematics.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities dipped in 2016. Effective support and intervention organised by the special educational needs coordinator is now helping these pupils to catch up.
- A culture of reading is embedded across the school. Pupils read with confidence during lessons and also during tutor time. Year 7 pupils who start below national expectations benefit from effective literacy intervention, which accelerates their progress. However, the provision for pupils who arrive at the school behind in mathematics is less structured. Pupils receive some additional support in tutor time, but the impact of this is not evaluated, despite the school receiving funding specifically to help pupils catch up in mathematics.

- Work in books shows a high standard of work across the curriculum. Basic skills are developed systematically, although pupils are not consistently required to explain their thinking and this sometimes limits their learning to a more superficial level. Pupils spend a lot of time improving their practice at answering current examination questions. They are well prepared for their GCSEs, which helps them achieve a range of good qualifications to enhance their future prospects. However, work in books shows the expectation that pupils will apply their knowledge and understanding and justify their reasoning is inconsistent. This limited acquisition of these techniques may limit pupils' success in attaining higher and further education qualifications.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The sixth form opened in September 2014, offering an academic curriculum of AS- and A-level subjects, designed to facilitate entry to the top universities. However, students were not well prepared for the demands of these courses and achievement has been low. On entry to the sixth form, students were not monitored closely or provided with enough support for their studies. Only half of the students who started in both September 2014 and 2015 continued with their same A-level subjects into Year 13.
- School leaders and the academy trust acted appropriately by broadening the curriculum and improving accountability in the sixth form. A vocational pathway was introduced in September 2016, which has proved popular. One of the vice principals oversees the progress of pupils, through subject leaders, who are expected to raise students' achievement. The newly appointed head of sixth form, who runs the day-to-day provision, has strengthened arrangements for independent study and improved attendance. Although it is too soon to show the full impact of these measures, the school's own tracking information indicates that students are making better progress towards their targets.
- Provisional 2016 results show that, although the small number of students who completed their A-level studies did not make strong progress in all subjects, they all achieved places at their first-choice universities. Some sixth-form students who had not made good progress by the end of Year 12 left to study vocational courses at local colleges. Others started Year 12 again, studying different subjects, including the new vocational pathway. School leaders supported those leaving the sixth form to help them find suitable destinations.
- Teaching in the sixth form is variable. Within the same lesson, some students make much more progress than others. Generally, teachers provide helpful feedback to students about their work, helping them to ensure that their understanding matches the requirements of examination boards.
- Leaders, including the head of sixth form, meet students' pastoral needs well. Students show an increasingly mature approach to their studies and are growing in confidence as they find out how to learn for themselves. They are supported well by a core programme of personal development that develops students' wider interests. Work experience forms an integral part of the study programme for all Year 12 students, and is optional for Year 13 students. Staff and students report that this improves their employability skills.

- Students are provided with independent careers information and guidance, including high-quality support for admission to university and applications for apprenticeships. Sixth-form students who spoke with inspectors were inspired by the range of visiting speakers from universities and companies who raised and widened students' career aspirations.

School details

Unique reference number	135965
Local authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	10021493

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	616
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	The Venerable Dr Joanne Grenfell
Principal	Clive Barnes
Telephone number	02392 824204
Website	http://charteracademy.org.uk/
Email address	info@charteracademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 May 2012

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 academy is sponsored by the Ark Multi-Academy Trust.
- The founding principal left her post at the end of August 2016. A senior vice-principal, who had been on secondment last year, returned in September as interim principal until the end of this academic year.

- Ark Charter Academy is an 11 to 18, smaller than average-sized, mixed comprehensive school. A sixth form, for pupils aged 16 to 18, opened in September 2014.
- There are higher numbers of disadvantaged pupils compared to the national average.
- The school has a slightly larger than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups. There is a higher than average proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at The Harbour School.
- The school achieved well above the government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 34 lessons across a range of year groups and subjects. Around a third of these lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work in lessons and a further selection of pupils' books was chosen to scrutinize. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school and during breaks.
- Inspectors held meetings with the interim principal and senior leaders, groups of middle leaders, teachers, governors and the Director of Education for Ark trust. Inspectors took account of 86 responses to the confidential questionnaires received from staff. They also telephoned leaders of alternative provision.
- The views of pupils were taken into account and inspectors met with three groups of pupils, including sixth-form students, and considered 21 responses to the pupil online questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, taking into account 45 responses to the online Ofsted parent questionnaire, Parent View, including 40 free-text responses.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school's strategic planning documents, minutes of meetings including governor discussions, reports of attendance and behaviour, and records related to pupils' safety and academic progress.

Inspection team

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Lucy English	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Bagust	Ofsted Inspector
Taj Bhambra	Ofsted Inspector

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