

# Inspection of Ark Castledown Primary Academy

Priory Road, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 3QT

---

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 November 2021

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Good**

---

The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Outstanding**

Early years provision

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Ark Castledown Primary Academy converted to become an academy school in September 2017. When its predecessor school, Castledown Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted in September 2013, it was judged to be good overall.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at this school have very positive relationships with school staff. They have confidence in them. They know that staff are there to keep them safe, and that they will help them with any worries they have.

There are high expectations for every pupil at this school across the subjects taught. All children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), now get off to an excellent start with their reading. This is enabling them to access the ambitious new curriculum that leaders have introduced.

Pupils understand the 'learning for life' values of 'eloquence, grit, responsibility, confidence, kindness and curiosity'. Pupils know why these values are important, and how they will help them succeed now and into the future. Staff are unwavering in their expectation that every pupil will live by these values and follow classroom rules. Classrooms are calm and settled, and learning is now very rarely disrupted by behaviour. If bullying is identified, staff act swiftly and effectively to address it.

Parents recognise that staff provide children and their families with a high level of support. There is, for example, a weekly drop-in counselling service that pupils and parents can access.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

This school became an academy and joined a multi-academy trust in September 2017. Prior to this, there had been a very concerning decline in the attainment and progress of pupils. Leaders within the school and the multi-academy trust took rapid and highly effective action in response to this decline. They knew that they needed to ensure that all pupils learned to read fluently. A new phonics curriculum was introduced. Leaders have ensured that every member of staff has expert knowledge of teaching reading. The books that younger children read help them to practise the sounds they have learned. For those few pupils who fall behind age-related expectations, expert teaching and support continues to be provided until they are fluently able to read. From Nursery to Year 6, teachers read to their classes daily to help foster a real love of reading. Within the school day, there is dedicated time for pupils to read for pleasure, discuss their reading choices and share recommendations.

A new mathematics curriculum has been introduced, which starts when children join the school in Nursery. All staff have been trained to deliver the new mathematics curriculum in a highly effective and consistent way. Pupils are given regular opportunities to revisit and consolidate key mathematical knowledge. This repeated recall ensures that, over time, they learn and remember more and become increasingly fluent mathematicians.

Leaders within the multi-academy trust work closely with school leaders to ensure that teachers receive focused and highly effective professional development so that, over time, their teaching of the curriculum becomes increasingly expert. The impact of this work is particularly evident in relation to reading and mathematics, as this has been a key focus since academisation. In these subjects, pupils are now receiving an exceptional quality of education.

The impact of this support is also clear in the foundation subjects, but this work is at an earlier stage. In these subjects, the trust has worked with subject leaders within school to develop a model curriculum. Each curriculum is carefully sequenced and sets out the knowledge that pupils need to learn over time. Subject leaders within school have been supported to personalise each curriculum to take account of the specific context of this school. Staff are being supported to develop their subject knowledge in all subjects. Pupils with SEND are well supported so that they too can access the ambitious learning in each subject.

Leaders have a clear ambition for each foundation subject to be taught as effectively as reading and mathematics are taught, so that pupils at this school receive an exceptional education in every subject. This is currently the focus for school leaders and for leaders within the multi-academy trust. Alongside this work on the curriculum, other well-considered projects, such as developing a whole-school oracy programme, are being implemented.

A broad range of clubs are offered by the school. Leaders carefully consider how to ensure that all pupils can access clubs. For example, sports clubs run at lunchtime. Pupils enjoy a wide range of trips and enriching experiences within the school's curriculum.

Positive relationships sit at the heart of behaviour management at this school. Staff always maintain clear and consistent expectations for behaviour. They also have a detailed knowledge of individual pupil's needs and how to get the best from every learner.

Leadership and governance at this school are exceptional. Despite a number of leaders being new to post, the clarity of vision, the training and professional development provided both within the school and within the trust mean that all leaders are extremely well focused on the education provided by the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders at this school always act in the best interests of pupils. They have trained staff so that staff understand the signs that suggest a pupil is at risk of harm or has been harmed. There are clear systems in place to record concerns, and to record action taken. These systems are also used to carefully monitor vulnerable pupils over time. The attendance, behaviour, pastoral care and safeguarding teams work very closely together so that they are able to draw together information and really

understand the potential risks that some pupils might be facing. Leaders consistently ensure that pupils get the help that they need, referring to external agencies in a timely and effective way.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In some foundation subjects, the curriculum has been implemented recently and has not had time to fully embed. Staff are not as expert in the teaching of geography, for example, as they are in teaching reading. Staff knowledge and expertise across foundation subjects should be further developed so that pupils' knowledge and understanding of each subject will also deepen over time.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## **Further information**

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	144083
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10203173
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	366
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trustees</b>	Paul Marshall
<b>Principal</b>	Mark Rankin
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.arkcastledown.org">www.arkcastledown.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	19 September 2013, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The principal was appointed in September 2020.
- The deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2020.
- The school is currently using one registered alternative provider.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club on site.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, senior leaders and staff. Inspectors spoke with those responsible for governance, local governors, and executive leaders within the multi-academy trust.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, geography and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors listened to pupils in key stage 1 reading. They talked to pupils in key stage 2 about reading.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about every national curriculum subject.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors met with leaders responsible for safeguarding, reviewed safeguarding records, checked the single central register and spoke to leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans and minutes from local governing body meetings.
- Inspectors talked to pupils formally and informally about their learning, what behaviour is like at school and whether they felt safe at school.
- Inspectors reviewed staff's and parents' surveys and spoke to parents and carers on the gate.

### **Inspection team**

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Hogarth

Ofsted Inspector

Gareth Flemington

Her Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2022