

Ark Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135600
Local Authority	Not Applicable
Inspection number	361465
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Scott HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	407
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patrick Wall
Headteacher	Delia Smith (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Forty Avenue Wembley HA9 9JR
Telephone number	0208 385 4370
Fax number	0208 385 4370
Email address	info@arkacademy.org

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 38 lessons. They met with groups of pupils, governors and academy staff. They observed the academy's work, and looked at a range of policies and other academy documentation. They analysed 147 questionnaires returned by parents as well as those from staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How effective is teaching at targeting individual learning needs, particularly those of the more able pupils?
- What impact has the specialist status had on the academy?
- What impact do new technologies have on outcomes for pupils?

Information about the school

Ark Academy opened in September 2008 to Reception children. The academy now has pupils up to Year 2 in the primary phase. The brand new, purpose-built learning environment for all phases was opened ready for the first intake of Year 7 in September 2010. The academy nursery also opened in September 2010. The academy and staffing levels are growing rapidly each year. The planned roll of 1630 will include a sixth form. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those whose first language is not English are above average. The academy has specialisms in mathematics and citizenship.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

A great deal of work has brought about a new school that has quickly established high expectations and secured impressive progress in the short period since opening. Pupils make outstanding progress in their studies. They greatly enjoy coming to school and attendance is high. Pupils behave well and they respond enthusiastically to the growing team of dedicated staff. Relationships between adults and pupils are very positive and help to promote above average attainment. The pupil population is diverse but nevertheless, the academy achieves a strong inclusive ethos. The academy has only one quarter of the final intake number and systems are developing well to accommodate its expected growth.

The principal, headteacher of the primary section, governors and the senior team, have developed rapidly a clear sense of purpose and strong, ambitious plans to ensure pupils get a good deal from their school days. The governing body has clear priorities and plans to ensure that the academy is always operating at the highest level. Clear expectations of pupils established from the beginning, have been further developed with the move to new accommodation. An appealing new nursery has been established. The first pupils to enter Year 7 show a pride in their academy and have demonstrated effective learning habits.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. There are aspects that are outstanding including the consistently high expectations and rigorous lesson planning. However, in a small minority of lessons, these plans are not always implemented fully. Some lessons would benefit from engaging students more in small group work. The academy has very good systems to check pupils' progress over time and this information is used to inform future planning. The academy has established a pattern of regular lesson observations, including teaching peers as well as senior leaders. These are highly effective in improving practice in the classroom as well as ensuring

consistency, though the procedures are slightly different between the primary and secondary phases. Most staff believe that they are well supported professionally and are particularly complimentary about the recent and ongoing staff training.

The academy's specialism in mathematics and citizenship play a significant role in pupils' developments both academically, through an emphasis on teaching core skills well, and in developing pupils' very positive attitudes to school and learning. The academy has a clear rationale for the current outstanding curriculum and this has already helped to ensure that literacy, as well as mathematics, has been a prime focus. Pupils are confident to participate in all areas of academy life and are increasingly active and involved in their learning.

The academy has already established strong systems to support pupils' learning. The induction for Year 7 pupils was very thorough. It included getting to know all of the families joining the academy and provided comprehensive information for parents and pupils. A conspicuous range of support services is available including partnerships with external agencies.

This is a very young academy that is rapidly developing strong plans to improve partnerships with parents as well as further increase pupils' responsibilities in establishing wider-reaching community cohesion. There is a growing sense of community cohesion within the academy and senior staff are aware that more can be done to plan for and develop this wider afield. It is early days for the academy to have a major impact in these areas. Where it has prioritised actions, the outcomes have been highly effective. For example, parents are generally very happy with the academy so far and responded positively to the parent questionnaire. Pupils are already involved as anti-bullying mentors and the primary section has a growing academy council. These successes, and the considerable progress pupils are making, all demonstrate the academy's outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase further the impact of teaching on learning by ensuring that:
 - the rigorous planning of lessons is fully exploited by careful implementation
 - the number of outstanding lessons is increased by the use of greater individual or small group work
 - the induction of all new staff to the academy matches that of existing staff

- Establish more firmly the contribution to the local and wider community by building on the already evident strong community cohesion within the academy.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

Pupils really enjoy their lessons and activities and appreciate the efforts of their teachers to make learning interesting. The ability range of children when they start in the Nursery or Reception classes is wide but, on the whole, they start with skills, knowledge and understanding that are well below what is expected for their age. Pupils in Year 7 enter the academy with prior attainment that is broadly average. They make outstanding progress and this success has built a high level of confidence and established an eagerness to engage with all of the learning opportunities presented. There is a very impressive record of pupil progress in the specialist area of mathematics as well as in science, particularly by pupils in Year 2. Pupils are able to fully engage in their learning throughout the curriculum because the academy successfully focused on literacy as a priority. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also outstanding.

In most lessons, teachers demonstrate a very high level of skill in the use of questioning to develop and assess learning. Pupils respond very well to this. The vast majority of pupils, including pupils who find literacy difficult, are willing to participate with well-constructed answers offered to the rest of the class for further analysis. This was one of the ways that illustrated how safe they feel in working in the academy. There is a strong sense of community and the citizenship ethos is evident throughout lessons. Pupils have a growing understanding of how they may take a full part in society. Behaviour is good and pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong and what constitutes fairness and equality. They report that they can talk to teachers and other adults if they need to. They confirm they are well supported by staff who will always help them when they ask for assistance.

The vast majority of pupils eat in the academy canteen and enjoy the high quality food provided. Pupils access a wide range of sport during enrichment time. They positively participate in leading a healthy lifestyle and have a clear understanding of what it means.

Pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills are developed very well and there is an ethos within the academy promoting high aspirations for all pupils. Access to university is overtly promoted which ensures that pupils are very well prepared for the next stages of learning and their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	2
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching in the academy is good overall with much that is outstanding. Teachers are analytical about their practice and are well supported. In lessons, new technologies and a range of media are used effectively to enhance learning. At its best, the teaching is inspiring and highly tailored to individual needs, developing independent learning skills. This promotes the highest levels of progress, engages pupils in the subject, builds confidence and develops an understanding of, and passion for, learning. During one lesson, pupils engaged in discussions, formulating clear hypotheses and modifying their thinking as they listened to others. They understood what they were learning but also understood the rationale behind the learning and saw the relevance of it in other areas of their lives. Lesson plans are consistently completed to a high standard. In a small proportion of lessons where pupils were passive for too long, they made less progress and lost concentration. However, they responded quickly when they were invited to work in pairs or small groups. This effective strategy is not consistently

adopted throughout the academy. Where lessons include a wide variety of activities the pace of learning is brisk.

The academy has an effective strategy for implementing and developing the curriculum. More able students have made a very impressive start in the school and have thrived on the opportunities available. Leaders understand the need for the curriculum to develop as learners' profiles change and staffing develops with the growth across the academy phases. The curriculum currently supports the learning needs of individuals very well and teachers tailor experiences for groups using strategies such as single sex classes in English. Teachers are beginning to take advantage of having a multi-phase academy site to develop further opportunities in physical education and in mathematics. Students in Year 7 start the day with a period reading and finish the afternoon with an enrichment programme. This gives an element of choice and is highly motivating. This variety is an important part of the academy's curriculum and extends the learning time for all pupils significantly.

Care, guidance and support for pupils have been quickly established and procedures for supporting more vulnerable pupils are already very effective. Systems for identifying needs and supporting pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are working very well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The outstanding principal and her excellent senior leaders have, in a very short period, realised an ambitious vision for the academy with no hint of complacency. Leaders and staff have established quickly, a successful learning environment with happy and well-motivated learners. Staff and pupils share a strong sense of community and passion for developing the academy still further. The clear, determined ambition and success so far demonstrate an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. The staff team are

proud to be a part of the academy and understand how they contribute to the developments.

The leadership and management of teaching and learning are outstanding. There are clear expectations of all staff. From the start of the academy, the principal ensured that teachers and assistants learned from their own experiences and from the successes of other staff. There are substantial opportunities for staff to observe and work alongside other colleagues as well as receiving feedback from leaders on their own performance. The co-teaching in the secondary section allows teachers to see how others work and is helping to ensure consistency but this is not currently used in the primary phase. Teachers report that professional development has been very effective.

The governing body is highly effective and is increasingly moving away from the extraordinary work of establishing a brand new academy to ensuring that the success to date is built upon. The chair of the governing body has an extremely high level of understanding about the academy's priorities and ensures that these are focused on. The governing body effectively uses the information from external monitoring and is becoming increasingly systematic about checking the impact of policies and practice. Senior leaders, managers and the governing body are clear how monitoring needs to be further refined, for example with policies and procedures that are appropriate for all phases of learning in a growing school. Safeguarding procedures meet current legislation and the academy is clear how they can develop these.

The academy is highly inclusive; it actively promotes equality with its strong specialist focus on citizenship and is successful in ensuring that discrimination does not arise. Leaders monitor the progress of a wide range of groups in the school to ensure equality of opportunity is maintained.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1

The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

When children start, their skills are well below what might be expected in key areas, for example, in aspects of their personal and language development. Children make outstanding progress, and almost all children are above what is expected for their age when they start Key Stage 1.

Children rapidly develop their personal skills because they experience a friendly, caring and safe environment where they can flourish and successfully build their self-esteem and confidence. The consistently good teaching provides frequent opportunities for children to give their ideas and answer questions, and this has a significant positive impact on their personal and language development. Children are very willing to participate in their tasks and enjoy what they do. During the times when children are choosing their own activities they are very confident when making decisions about whether or not to work on their own or with their friends.

Teachers' planning is very detailed and ensures that there is a good balance of tasks enabling children to work indoors and outdoors, making the most of the excellent facilities and equipment. Good attention is given to ensuring that key basic skills in literacy and numeracy are taught thoroughly and this is reflected in the high levels achieved. In numeracy, for example, the youngest children enjoyed describing and making patterns. They had fun talking about the brightly patterned adults' clothes worn especially for the occasion. Older children in Reception worked hard to develop their addition skills using a variety of materials to help with counting. Many of them were confident to go on and record more formally on paper what they had done practically.

Adults have an excellent understanding of children's progress because they regularly assess what they can do. They record information about children's achievements carefully, to be used for future planning. Under the excellent leadership of the early years manager and head of the primary academy, there is a strong drive to improve and clear commitment to secure even greater quality in the future. In a very short space of time the early years manager has established a highly effective Nursery class and is bringing consistency of approach across the whole of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Excellent links are established with parents who were very complimentary about an information evening on how to help teach their children to read.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents are very happy with the work of the academy so far. They feel that pupils are making good progress and are kept safe. A small minority of parents would like more information about the progress of their children and this could have been communicated better. The vast majority have only praise for the academy.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ark Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 147 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 407 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	97	66	47	32	3	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	101	69	42	29	2	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	74	50	56	38	15	10	0	0

My child is making enough progress at this school	80	54	62	42	3	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	92	63	54	37	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	77	52	62	42	8	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	82	56	58	39	6	4	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	68	46	58	39	4	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	63	43	76	52	4	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	85	58	53	36	4	3	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	60	41	67	46	7	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	85	58	58	39	2	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	94	64	52	35	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is

2		serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's capacity for sustained improvement. • Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. • The quality of teaching. • The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. • The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

26 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ark Academy, Wembley, HA9 9JR

Thank you very much for the friendly welcome you gave to the inspection team. It was good to see your impressive new building and your work.

Although this outstanding e academy has only been open a short time, it has already had a considerable positive impact. You know how hard your teachers work and we were impressed by the planning they do for lessons. Teachers know what you can do and what you need to do next to maximise your progress. They plan an outstanding curriculum to maintain your interest and enable your continued excellent achievement. We were impressed by your development of skills which are relevant for your future employment or training. Teaching is good overall, but there are a significant number of outstanding lessons. You have very positive attitudes toward learning and greatly enjoy your time at the academy. This enjoyment helps you to make outstanding progress and achieve very well. A small number of lessons would have been even better if there had been more opportunity for group work.

The academy provides you with a high level of support and you have a very clear understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. You have a strong sense of right and wrong and understand what it means to be a good citizen in society. It was good to hear how well the academy managed the move of Year 7 pupils into the academy.

The learning environment is of very high quality and it was good to see how well you are all using it. It was very pleasing to see the younger pupils use the outdoor areas despite the very cold weather. Even though the academy has very good facilities the local community is used well and one group was excited to out on a shopping trip to the supermarket. However, we have asked the academy to find more ways for you to contribute to the wider community.

Leaders and managers are outstanding. They have worked incredibly hard to ensure you experience a rich learning environment. They are ambitious for you and have very high expectations of you and those who help you achieve. You behave well and appreciate the opportunities the academy offers you. Make sure you continue to make the most of your school days and achieve the highest of standards so that you have choices for your future. You have a big responsibility as founder members of the academy in ensuring that, as the academy grows the high level of achievement is maintained.

I wish you all well in all that you do.

Yours sincerely

Paul Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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