

Inspection of Ark Dickens Primary Academy

Turner Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO1 4PN

Inspection dates: 12–13 November 2019

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are positive about their school. They enjoy learning and told inspectors that the school has greatly improved since the new principal arrived. Staff expect pupils to 'aim high' in all areas of life. When faced with difficulties, pupils are encouraged to apply 'grit and resilience' and to never give up.

All adults expect pupils to behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils say that behaviour has greatly improved since leaders introduced the new behaviour code of conduct.

Pupils appreciate the wide range of activities available to them. They spoke excitedly to us about the '11 x 11' programme where every pupil takes part in eleven memorable experiences during their time at school. These fully funded activities range from rolling down a hill to going on a residential trip to France. After-school clubs are equally popular. At present, every club is full.

Pupils told us that they feel safe in school. They know that if they have a problem they could talk to any of the adults at the school. Pupils say that bullying does happen occasionally, and, when it does, adults sort it out quickly.

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

The quality of education has been improving rapidly since the appointment of the current principal. As a result, standards have improved and outcomes are improving.

Leaders have designed plans to show what pupils must learn in each subject. These plans are ordered in a way to ensure that pupils develop their skills and are able to build on previous knowledge. In some subjects, for example French and history, these plans have only been recently introduced. As a result, the ways by which teachers check what pupils know and remember are not yet consistent across the school.

Reading is a priority at this school. Leaders have strengthened the teaching of reading significantly. All staff are well trained to teach phonics. Pupils' progress in phonics is carefully checked. Immediate support is put in place should any pupil fall behind. The books that pupils read are well matched to their ability. Pupils who read to inspectors used their phonics knowledge well when reading unfamiliar words. Pupils told us that they increasingly enjoy reading and that they are encouraged to read at home and at school.

Leaders and teachers are aware that too few pupils attain the higher standards in writing. Leaders are starting to address this by ensuring that pupils are given a wide range of experiences to base their writing on. For example, Reception children chased the gingerbread man across the playground before writing confidently about their experiences.

Physical education is a strength of the school. Leaders have developed a curriculum that ensures pupils develop their skills, fitness and understanding of healthy lifestyles.

Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported with their learning. These pupils take part in the full range of activities offered at the school. Work is carefully planned to help pupils be successful. As a result, both disadvantaged and pupils with SEND achieve well.

Pupils' personal development is a high priority for the school. Leaders ensure that pupils are given life experiences that they might not otherwise have, for example sleeping under canvas or going to the opera. Pupils learn about a range of cultures and religions. They come to understand democracy by voting for house captains and school councillors, for example.

Many children enter the early years with speaking and listening skills below those which are typical for their age. From day one, school staff work hard to develop children's language through carefully targeted support. This support enables the children to read and write well by the end of the Reception Year. They are supported effectively to develop their mathematics skills. They leave Reception ready for the challenges of Year 1.

Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now close to the national average. However, leaders know that they need to do even more to improve the attendance of those who are persistently absent.

During our visit, pupils behaved well, listened well to their teachers and to each other. Occasionally, a few pupils do lose focus, especially when they find the work challenging; however, this does not disrupt other pupils' learning and teachers promptly catch their attention again.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They feel well supported and say that there is a caring culture.

The trust board monitors the school effectively. It provides support where required. The trust offers many opportunities for staff to improve their subject knowledge. This has had a positive effect on the confidence of teachers to deliver lessons across the foundation subjects.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture of safeguarding reflects the school's caring nature. Staff are well trained and vigilant. They know what to do if a pupil is at risk and follow up on any concerns immediately. Leaders follow up safeguarding issues rigorously. They work well with a wide range of external agencies to support vulnerable children and their families.

Pupils are taught to keep safe in a range of situations, including how to safely use social media and the internet. They know that they should never share passwords with their friends.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Assessment is used effectively in mathematics, reading and writing to inform teaching. However, assessment of the foundation subjects is not yet embedded across the school. Subject leaders need to ensure that they develop how teachers assess what pupils have learned and remembered across the foundation subjects.
- Although attendance is improving, the attendance of a small group of pupils is not good enough. Leaders need to continue the work they have started with parents and carers of pupils who are persistently absent to ensure that these pupils attend school more regularly.
- Leaders are aware that the most able are not always challenged sufficiently, particularly in writing. Leaders need to swiftly implement their current plans to address this.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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're 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

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| Unique reference number | 141020 |
| Local authority | Portsmouth |
| Inspection number | 10111142 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 442 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Ian Wade |
| Principal | Fiona Chapman |
| Website | www.arkdickensprimary.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 27–28 June 2017 |

Information about this school

- The present principal was appointed in September 2018.
- Ark Dickens Primary Academy is one of 17 primary schools and 21 secondary schools in the Ark Schools Academy trust. The trust board has delegated responsibility for monitoring the quality of education to the local governing body of the school.

Information about this inspection

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

- We met with senior leaders, a representative from the Ark Academy Trust and the chair of the local governing board.
- On the first day of the inspection, we considered the quality of education. We did deep dives in reading, mathematics, writing, modern foreign languages, history and physical education. We talked to subject leaders, staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. We considered a wider range of subjects on the second day.
- We visited lessons in all year groups, sometimes accompanied by a senior leader.

- An inspector listened to several pupils read and observed phonics teaching in the Reception and key stage 1 classes.
- I met with a newly qualified teacher to evaluate their induction into the school and the support given.
- We considered the views of parents, staff and pupils by analysing responses to questionnaires.
- We looked at documentation provided by the school. This included the school's own development plan and documentation related to child protection, safeguarding and attendance.

Inspection team

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|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Brian Macdonald, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Alison Ashcroft | Ofsted Inspector |
| Liz McIntosh | Ofsted Inspector |

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