

ARK Kings Academy

Shannon Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham, B38 9DE

Inspection dates 24–25 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough students make good progress in their studies because, although improving, the standard of teaching has not been good enough over time for all students to reach the levels of achievement of which they are capable.
- When teachers plan their lessons, they do not make enough use of information they have about what students know and can do to make sure the work is matched to the needs of all learners.
- Teachers do not check thoroughly exactly how much students understand and, on occasion, teachers' expectations of how quickly their students can learn are too low.
- Teachers' marking does not always lead to improvements in students' work.
- Students' progress in writing is not good.
- Behaviour in lessons is not good when teaching is less engaging.
- Attendance is below average and actions taken to improve it have not been effective enough.
- Exclusions remain significantly higher than the national average.
- Actions recently taken by academy leaders to improve achievement, through closer monitoring of teaching, making better use of information about students' progress and making subject leaders responsible for the work of their teams have not had the consistent impact intended.

The school has the following strengths

- The new Principal has a clear vision for the academy and his ambitions are shared by students, parents and staff. The impact is demonstrated by the recent improvements in GCSE results and in improvement in students' reading skills.
- Teachers have strong relationships with students and parents. Students say they appreciate the support they receive.
- Teaching assistants are well deployed in supporting the learning of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs.
- The academy is improving the achievement of students who are disadvantaged or who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Students' behaviour around the academy, including at breaks and lunchtimes is calm and purposeful.
- The academy sponsor provides good support and challenge to academy leaders and teachers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 27 lessons across all year groups, of which 7 were seen jointly with senior leaders. The work in students’ books was evaluated. They also made short visits to a sample of lessons to talk to students about their learning. In addition, inspectors visited assemblies, lunchtime activities and tutor periods.
- The inspection team observed the behaviour of students as they arrived at the academy, during lesson changeovers, at break and lunchtimes, as they left the academy premises at the end of the day as well as in lessons.
- Account was taken of the results of the academy’s own questionnaire given to parents as there were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be taken into account by inspectors. Inspectors met with parents who visited the academy to speak with the inspection team.
- Inspectors looked at important documents including examination results and records of students’ assessment. They scrutinised the academy’s policies and procedures for safeguarding and child protection. They examined records relating to behaviour and attendance and looked at documents used by leaders and governors to check the work of staff at the academy.
- Inspectors met with groups of students of different ages, abilities and backgrounds. They discussed achievement, teaching, behaviour, safety and how students are prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, academy leaders, including heads of subject and the special educational needs coordinator, governors including the Chair of the local Governing Body and representatives of the academy sponsor, ARK.

Inspection team

Peter Humphries, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Dorothy Martin

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- ARK Kings Academy opened in September 2012 and is sponsored by ARK Schools.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students supported through a statement of special educational needs or the new education, health and care plans or those who receive special educational needs support is above average. There are no students with an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for the pupil premium is much higher than average.
- Student mobility, the number of students who leave or join the academy during the academic year, is higher than average. 43 per cent of the students leaving the academy last year had not started their education at ARK Kings Academy.
- Almost two thirds of the students are from White British backgrounds, a smaller proportion than average. Approximately a tenth of the students are from Black or Black British African backgrounds.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of more-able students entering the academy is small and well below national figures.
- Provision for students on alternative programmes, predominantly to support social and emotional difficulties, is arranged through the south Birmingham area network and the Reach Free School. Schools working in collaboration with ARK Kings Academy to support students with social and emotional difficulties include Harborne Academy, Baverstock Academy and Turves Green Boys' and Girls' schools. Two students with medical conditions are currently educated at the James Brindley School.
- The academy does not have a sixth form. There are plans to open a sixth form after September 2017.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring all teachers:
 - use the information about students' knowledge, skills and understanding of key concepts to prepare learning activities that address their individual learning needs and capabilities
 - mark students' work and provide feedback that leads to measurable improvement
 - check the students' understanding more rigorously to identify and resolve misconceptions and misunderstandings
 - develop students' resilience in problem solving, particularly in mathematics.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that actions have the intended impact by:
 - evaluating the effect of teaching on the students' learning and progress and identifying good practice that is shared with staff
 - ensuring subject leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities and further develop their skills in checking the work of their teams so that they are able to drive forward improvements in learning, teaching and students' behaviour
 - working closely with families to improve the attendance and behaviour of the students who do not attend school regularly enough or who have a high number of fixed term exclusions
 - ensuring all teachers use consistent approaches to develop students' writing skills.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Although there have been recent important changes, these have not had long enough to produce a sustained improvement in students' progress.
- Leaders have not yet secured consistently good teaching across different year groups and subjects to ensure that all students make good progress.
- There are still inconsistencies in the implementation of recent changes. For example, not all teachers are checking students' understanding in order to appropriately modify their lessons. There is inconsistency in the way teachers mark students' work and provide feedback that helps students improve their work.
- The effectiveness of subject leaders in bringing about improvements to the quality of learning and teaching and students' behaviour is variable and the monitoring and evaluation of the team for which they are responsible is inconsistent.
- Academy leaders ensure students feel safe and understand how to resist the temptations to act in a way that is unlawful or anti-social. However, students' behaviour in a number of lessons requires improvement and students' attendance, while improving, is lower than national figures.
- Leaders have quite rightly recognised the need to invest in high-quality training and coaching for all staff to ensure teaching improves. However, not enough is done to identify and share the good practice that already exists within the academy, particularly in mathematics.
- Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement. However, the academy improvement plan does not have milestones against which the academy's progress can be measured or when monitoring and evaluation of actions will take place.
- The appointment of the new Principal in September 2014 has energised the academy community and brought about a clear focus on ensuring students' make the progress expected of them. This has inspired the great majority of staff, who are now committed to raising standards rapidly. There is a clear capacity to improve reflected in the increase in the number of students making the progress expected of them, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced at Key Stage 3 and includes additional time to develop students' literacy skills. In Key Stage 4, the curriculum reflects the academy's vision of 'depth before breadth' and a focus on academic qualifications. Students are taught for a greater number of hours each week than is usual for secondary-age students. The curriculum is complemented by a large number of enrichment activities such as music and sport and a range of local, national and international visits. The curriculum is effective in preparing students for life in modern Britain and for the next stage in their education or employment. All the students who left the academy in 2014 at the end of Year 11 secured a place in further education, employment and training. Students receive helpful and independent careers information, advice and guidance.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted suitably both through the curriculum and in the wider life of the academy. It is fostered by a range of visits and by the wide variety of provision in music, art and sport together with assemblies and religious education lessons that give many opportunities for students to reflect on serious issues.
- The academy has particular strengths in how it supports students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. This has helped reduce the number of exclusions and the partnerships with other schools to provide alternative provision is effective. Safeguarding arrangements are secure, meet requirements and ensure students are safe. This includes ensuring visitors to the academy are subjected to rigorous checks on their suitability to work with children. The procedures to ensure students are safe when taken off the academy roll are secure. For example, students who have an unknown destination are referred to the local authority 'child missing in education' team.

- The system of managing teachers' performance is related to the 'Teachers' Standards' and is well organised. Salary progression is taken seriously and only occurs when merited by sustained good performance. Individual training needs are identified and implemented through this process.
- The academy sponsor provides good support for leaders and class teachers through a range of subject specialists who lead whole academy and more bespoke training. ARK provides curriculum support, for example through promoting the 'Mathematics Mastery' course which is developing students' mathematics knowledge and understanding in Key Stage 3.
- The academy has begun to develop its preferred approach to assessment following the removal of National Curriculum levels.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The ARK Schools board is the legal governing body of the academy and has the responsibility for ensuring statutory responsibilities are met. These responsibilities do not sit with the academy's local governing body. Governors are highly committed to their work. They know about the quality of provision in the academy through regular, rigorous and accurate academy monitoring visits and reviews. The work of teachers is monitored closely through, for example, collecting students' books to monitor the quality of work and teachers' marking. Governors are aware of the progress of students in receipt of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up grant and have ensured that this group of students achieve as well as other students. They ensure that the pay of teachers is linked to their success in the classroom and the other roles they undertake. They keep a close eye on the budget and are proactive in anticipating problems. Governors fulfil their statutory duties well and help ensure that students are safe and enjoy equality of opportunity. Governors have ensured that the academy promotes tolerance, an acceptance of religious and cultural diversity and prepares students for life in modern Britain. This has been achieved through a range of training that includes addressing issues of extremism and radicalisation.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Some students' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive and this affects the progress they, and others, make.
- The majority of students show respect for one another and for their teachers and other adults, responding quickly to staff instructions, so that lessons flow smoothly. However, in a number of lessons across the academy, low-level disruption means that learning is interrupted; this is generally where teaching is weak and fails to meet the individual needs of students. When teachers do not provide stimulating and engaging work at the appropriate level for students, some of them lose interest and misbehave.
- Students' attendance is below national figures. The number of students, who are persistently absent, missing 15 percent or more of lessons, is high. However, as a consequence of measures recently put in place, attendance is improving.
- The proportion of fixed-term exclusions, while falling, is above national figures. Recent permanent exclusions were for extreme incidents and the academy's response was reasonable and balanced.
- There is a calm feeling around the academy at break and lunchtimes. Most students conduct themselves well, showing consideration for the well-being of others. The introduction of table-tennis tables and basketball hoops in the academy playground has helped reduce the incidents of overly boisterous behaviour.
- The majority of students wear their uniform with pride. The academy buildings and facilities are treated with respect by most students. After breaks and lunchtimes, there is little litter as students generally use the bins provided.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Parents and students agree that students are safe in the academy. Students gave a good understanding of the dangers of bullying in all its forms,

including that based on racism and homophobia. In discussion, students say that instances of bullying are rare and any cases are dealt with quickly and effectively. One student spoke for many when he said that academy leaders have created an environment where 'we feel like a family'.

- Students have received information and guidance about how to keep themselves safe from the pressures of others who might try to make them behave in a way that is unlawful or antisocial. Students told inspectors that were clear on who to go to if they were the victims of, or saw, criminal acts,
- The development of students' e-safety ensures they are fully aware of the dangers of cyber bullying and the misuse of mobile phones including 'sexting'.
- Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, told inspectors that they are well cared for by staff and students.
- Students who receive part or all of their education at a partner school or Reach Free School have good attendance and information provided by the academy indicates that their behaviour is improving.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Standards of teaching over time have not enabled enough students to make the progress expected of them. While the quality of teaching is improving, students' learning is sometimes inhibited by the use of learning activities that fail to engage them or meet their needs. As a consequence, the progress of more able students is inconsistent across the academy.
- Where teaching is weak, teachers do not cater for students' different abilities. This leads to some students becoming frustrated because the work is either too easy or too difficult for them. This can result in low-level disruption and other off-task behaviour.
- Marking of students' work is inconsistent. Some teachers do not mark sufficiently often to provide useful feedback to students. In some cases, the marking does not suggest ways to improve. In other cases, suggestions or improvement are not followed through by the students or checked by the teacher.
- Teachers do not consistently check students' understanding of what is being learnt. As a consequence, the teaching moves on before the students have fully understood, picked up or learnt the work, key concept or skill.
- The development of students' writing skills is inconsistent. Although academy leaders have encouraged 'writing across the curriculum' this is not done well in all lessons, particularly in the lower sets. However, the development of students' speaking skills is developed well as a result of students being encouraged to always answer in full sentences and having opportunities to speak in lessons and in public, for example in assemblies.
- The majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and most have strong relationships with students.
- Where teaching is good, teachers carefully plan work to meet the learning needs of individuals or groups of students based on what they know about the students' knowledge and understanding. They provide individualised support for students who find the work harder and teaching assistants are used well to support students' learning.
- Students make good progress where they are expected to work at a good pace and the teacher has high expectations of what the students' can achieve.
- Good teaching uses probing questioning, not only to find out what students know but also to explore how they know. This leads to deeper understanding and quicker progress. In Year 7 mathematics mastery lessons, for example, students give reasons for answers, mistakes and explore alternative ways to solving the same problem. As a consequence, the students' enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of, mathematics is obvious and progress clear.

- Where marking is good, it identifies the achievements of students and points out how work can be improved. The best marking also provides opportunities for students to follow up teachers' suggestions. In some cases it is possible to see a dialogue between the teacher and student, leading to more secure understanding of concepts. This is particularly the case in mathematics where the use of the 'lesson exit slip' identifies what the student did well and what they need to do to improve their work and provides challenge questions which the student is expected to complete. These are followed up by the teacher.
- The academy thoroughly promotes reading. The academy uses a commercial reading programme that has had a demonstrable impact on improving students reading skills and desire to read widely and often. Regular events are staged to encourage reading including visits by poets.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Since the academy opened, students have not made good progress. They join the academy with significantly lower levels of achievement than seen nationally and do not catch-up as they do not make enough progress while at the academy.
- The most-able students, eight per cent of the Year 11 leavers in 2014, make less progress than their counterparts nationally. However, the achievement of disadvantaged students and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs is similar to or better than other students in the academy or students nationally.
- Academy leaders are committed to ensuring disadvantaged students or those who are disabled or who have special educational needs make the most of their abilities. As a consequence, the gap between the achievement of those students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium and others is closing. In 2013, on average, students known to be eligible for free school meals gained approximately two thirds of a grade lower than other students in English and a grade lower in mathematics. However, information provided by the academy shows that this gap has closed in 2014 to half a grade in mathematics and a no grade difference in English. Academy students who are disadvantaged are closing the gap on similar students nationally. In 2013, disadvantaged students achieved well over a grade lower in English and mathematics than similar students nationally. However, information provided by the academy shows that, in 2014, students in receipt of the pupil premium achieved approximately half a grade lower in English and a grade lower in mathematics than disadvantaged students nationally in 2013.
- As a result of inconsistent teaching of writing across the curriculum, students' writing skills are less well developed than their speaking and listening skills.
- Students' numeracy skills are improving as a result of the introduction of the 'Mathematics Mastery' course, especially in Year 7. However, older students still do not always show resilience when encountering mathematical problems and rely on the teacher to provide support or guidance.
- Students from different ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language make similar amounts of progress as other students.
- A large number of students arrive in the academy with very low reading ages. As a result of concerted intervention, information provided by the academy shows that, on average, students' reading ages increased by 18 months in a seven month period across the academy. Year 7 'catch-up' money is being used effectively to ensure students acquire the literacy and numeracy skills they need to be successful.
- The progress of students who attend education in other locations for part or all of the week is monitored closely. They make expected progress and many go on to study at further education institutes.
- The academy does not enter students early or use multiple entries for students for GCSE examinations
- The academy prepares its students suitably for their future education and careers. All the students who left the academy at the end of Year 11 in 2014 secured a place in further education, employment and training.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137578
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	426891

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	249
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Nelson
Principal	Roger Punton
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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