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15 December 2016

Mrs Herminder Channa  
Ark Boulton Academy  
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Birmingham  
West Midlands  
B11 2QG

Dear Mrs Channa

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Ark Boulton Academy**

Following my visit with Dan Owen, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Graham Tyrer, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 15–16 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint four newly qualified teachers, one each to the English, science, history and geography departments. If appointed, these teachers should receive additional support from the Ark Schools' support programme.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2015.**

- Raise achievement, especially in Key Stage 3, by:
  - improving the quality of teaching, reducing the number of supply teachers and level of teacher turnover
  - improving teachers' assessment to focus on what students know, can do and understand already and set students appropriately challenging targets
  - using test and assessment data more effectively to identify specific groups that need further support or challenge.
- Improve the experience of students in Year 7 by ensuring that teachers understand and appreciate the improved skill levels and increased knowledge of students transferring in from the local primary schools, and that they expect more of these students.
- Monitor more rigorously the impact of the additional, specialist funding for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Improve behaviour further by ensuring that all staff use the behaviour management system appropriately.
- Ensure that the academy has a secure and sustainable leadership team.

## **Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 15–16 November 2016**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, inspectors observed pupils' learning in a range of subjects across all year groups. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. Inspectors also spoke informally to pupils about pupils' behaviour, attendance and how they keep themselves safe. Inspectors heard a number of the least and most-able pupils read. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour as they arrived at the school, at break and lunchtimes and in lessons. Inspectors held meetings with you, school leaders and staff. I held a telephone discussion with the chair of the governing body. The views of staff were noted from the 62 responses to the school's own questionnaire to staff. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View for these to be considered. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's analysis of pupils' current attainment and progress, behaviour, attendance and punctuality. Additional documentation and procedures were scrutinised, including how the school keeps pupils safe and the checks on staff's suitability to work with children. The lines of enquiry during this inspection focused on: the progress of pupils overall including the most able and most-able disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; the induction of staff new to the school and their contribution to the consistent application of the school's policies; and the effectiveness of leaders and managers in improving pupils' behaviour and attendance.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection in June 2016, you have completed redundancy procedures. Twenty-nine new staff started at the school in September 2016. Staff new to the school include two vice-principals with responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching and for pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Other leaders new to the school include: a lead teacher with responsibility for newly qualified teachers; leaders with responsibility for key stage 3 English and mathematics; a Year 7 achievement leader; and the heads of department for geography, history, drama, music, physics, chemistry and food and nutrition. You have promoted two existing members of staff to new posts in the school, director of modern foreign languages and director of humanities. Three teachers have left the school since the start of term.

Two new governors have joined the local governing body. You have appointed staff to the human resources and administration team so that these aspects are dealt with in-house rather than by Ark Central's human resources staff.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

You and your leadership team continue to move the school forward. The induction

of staff and leaders new to the school has been largely effective and most staff share the view of one member of staff who said that, 'The principal has a clear vision for the academy. Not only does she want the best for our children, but she wants to develop the skills of a generation.' Staff who spoke with inspectors said that this term feels like a fresh start as staffing and leadership is stable and that the school is well led and managed by senior, subject and student support leaders. One member of staff spoke for many when they said, 'Since being new to my post in September, I have been struck by the feeling of unity and energy. There is clearly an overwhelming commitment to driving forward consistency and improving standards. The ethos of "We are all in it together" is evident in people's attitude, commitment and support of each other.' However, a few staff believe that previous weaknesses, such as the inconsistent application of the school's policies, remain. The findings from this inspection confirm that this is the case.

The vast majority of leaders are monitoring the work of their area of responsibility effectively and taking appropriate action where necessary. As a result, you and the governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have rightly identified that there needs to be a rapid improvement in pupils' attendance, punctuality and, in some areas of the school, behaviour. This is particularly the case in Year 9. In addition, you identify that the school needs to make improvements in the provision for the most able and most-able disadvantaged pupils so that these groups make the progress expected of them.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved through the school's 'enhanced provision' department. This includes a new sensory room, learning support centre and literacy support base. Information provided by the school shows that this, and other more established provision, helps the majority of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to make the progress expected of them. The improved identification of pupils' needs has resulted in pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties having their needs met where previously they were not. However, you correctly state that there is still much to be done to make sure that the progress of this group of pupils is consistent across all year groups in all subjects.

Leaders tailor the training for teachers and leaders to meet the needs of individual members of staff. As a result, staff greatly value and appreciate the training and support that they receive. This training effectively supports improvements in the quality of learning, teaching and assessment and the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Members of the local governing body and members of the Ark Schools Trust continue to challenge and support the school in equal measure. They have a clear view of the effectiveness of the school's provision and take suitable action where necessary. The increasing capacity of school leaders to improve standards has resulted in the Ark Schools' network leaders (school improvement advisors for specific areas such as special educational needs) reducing the amount of support

they provide. This fittingly reflects the improvements in the effectiveness of leaders and managers. However, leaders and governors have not reviewed all of the school's policies, for example the behaviour and health and safety policies, in line with the deadlines specified by the school. In addition, leaders have not uploaded the school's pupil premium report to the school's website.

The school's arrangements for child protection and safeguarding continue to be effective. Staff new to the school receive suitable induction training and they show an understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures and their roles and responsibilities in making sure pupils are safe. School leaders and staff work effectively with outside agencies to identify and support potentially vulnerable pupils. For example, staff quickly identify pupils missing from education and put in place procedures to find their whereabouts or to report them as missing to the local authority's children missing in education team. The checks on staff's suitability to work with children are thorough and detailed. The record of these checks is up to date and meets government requirements.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Pupils' progress is improving because the quality of teaching continues to improve. There are instances where teaching over time is inspirational and highly effective, particularly in religious studies, French and in some areas of science and English. Where teaching is most effective, teachers have secure subject knowledge which they use to plan and deliver lessons that engage, interest and stimulate pupils. In addition, they use what they know about pupils' knowledge and understanding to meet pupils' learning needs. However, a minority of teaching still fails to make sure that pupils do well, especially in history, geography and where pupils' behaviour in Years 8 and 9 inhibits learning. Leaders are taking decisive steps to improve with urgency the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

Information provided by the school shows that the most able and most-able disadvantaged pupils make the most progress where teaching challenges them to think deeply and to discuss, reflect on and write about increasingly difficult tasks, topics or issues. However, you and your staff recognise that, for the majority of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, there is insufficient challenge in their work to make sure that this group of pupils do well.

Where teaching is effective, teachers use purposeful homework to develop pupils' reflective writing skills, knowledge and understanding, or to prepare them for future learning.

There is greater consistency in pupils' learning as a result of the reduced number of changes to the teaching staff. The large majority of teachers follow the school's policies on providing written and verbal feedback, and this helps pupils to improve their knowledge and understanding and to speed up their progress. However, a small minority of staff do not make sure that their written feedback helps pupils to

improve their work. In addition, they do not consistently develop and improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar in line with the school's policy and expectation for teachers to do so.

An increasing number of staff apply the school's behaviour policy and systems consistently. However, you rightly recognise that the most significant barrier to a small minority of pupils' learning and progress is their poor behaviour, attitudes to learning and attendance. This is particularly the case in Year 9. During this inspection, inspectors observed a small minority of lessons hijacked by pupils who were rude, insolent and uncooperative. Staff also recognise that pupils' poor behaviour is having a negative impact on their learning. One member of staff commented that there are, 'Too many incidences of low level disruption in lessons across the school.' The newly appointed vice-principal with responsibility for pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare has put in place suitable strategies to address these issues. It is too early to see the impact.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The large majority of pupils are polite, friendly and welcoming. Pupils generally move around the school in a calm and purposeful way and take their learning and the learning of others seriously. The number of fixed-term exclusions has decreased compared to this time last year. However, the behaviour of a small minority of pupils, particularly in Year 9, remains a concern for you, other school leaders and staff. Leaders are taking appropriate steps to address this issue, for example through the introduction of an internal isolation room.

The proportion of pupils who are absent and persistently absent (missing more than 10% of school) remains high. Information provided by the school shows that this affects pupils' academic progress. Actions by school leaders and welfare staff are appropriate and they quickly identify and suitably support the most vulnerable pupils. However, these actions are yet to have an impact on rapidly improving pupils' attendance.

You and your staff continue to place considerable emphasis on making sure that pupils are safe and secure in the school and on trips and visits. This includes helping pupils to understand the risks of grooming, sexual exploitation and radicalisation through personal, social, health and economic education lessons and a range of assemblies. The majority of pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they know how to keep themselves safe and how to resist those who might try to persuade them to be unlawful or antisocial.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

The majority of pupils are doing better as a result of the improved teaching and feedback they receive. However, information provided by the school shows that currently pupils' progress is variable across the school and within subjects. For

example, pupils are doing well in mathematics in Year 7 but pupils in Year 9 are not making the progress expected of them. Pupils are generally doing well in religious education, art and design, English, modern foreign languages and science. The most able and most-able disadvantaged pupils are not doing well. The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, while improving, is variable across the school.

Most pupils, including the least and most able pupils, are making good progress in developing their reading and comprehension skills, especially in key stage 3. Staff direct pupils to choose a range of fiction and non-fiction books and reading materials that are suitable for their reading ability. The school effectively tracks pupils' reading habits to make sure that pupils select books that are appropriately demanding.

The unvalidated external information for pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 in 2016 shows that pupils made slightly less progress than those nationally with similar starting points. Pupils' progress in mathematics was above the national average but pupils' progress in English was below the national average. Lower-attaining pupils made better progress than similar pupils nationally. However, middle-attaining and high-attaining pupils made less progress than pupils with similar starting points nationally. Disadvantaged pupils' progress was not significantly different from the national average for other pupils in mathematics but slightly below in English.

### **External support**

You and your staff draw effectively on a range of support from external sources. For example, Ark Schools' network leaders continue to provide support and training for leaders, teachers and support staff. One member of staff spoke for others when they said that, 'I have never been in a school where my professional development as a support member of staff has been so looked after. We are part of Friday training session, which is great.' The trust continues to carry out half-termly monitoring visits. These visits correctly identify the school's strengths, weaknesses and next steps for improvement.

The pupil support team uses a range of outside agencies to identify and support potentially vulnerable pupils and their families. This has resulted in pupils improving their attendance and behaviour.