

Ark Castledown Primary Academy

URN: 144083 | Inspected: 11 November 2025

Safeguarding

standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

Achievement

Strong standard

Pupils achieve well. Pupils with low starting points catch up rapidly, especially in communication and language, and social and emotional development. Consequently, attainment across a range of subjects over time is above average, including phonics, and the combined reading, writing and mathematics outcomes at the end of key stage 2. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment is above other pupils nationally. Pupils' work across a range of subjects is of high quality. Pupils retain knowledge well across a range of subjects. They enjoy learning new vocabulary and use this language confidently, modelling the school's value of eloquence routinely. Adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities allow them to demonstrate their learning should their writing not be as advanced as their subject knowledge. Pupils are well prepared for their next stages. The most disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils get bespoke support to be ready for secondary school.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

The curriculum is very ambitious across all subjects. Each subject is designed carefully to develop pupils' subject expertise, alongside having a clear, highly appropriate focus on communication and language development. Starting in the early years, staff extend spoken vocabulary deliberately, building on children's prior knowledge very well. Leaders emphasise the essential, fundamental building blocks that pupils need. For example, the mantra of 'position, pencil grip and posture' is embedded into routines consistently. Leaders have a deep understanding of pupils' starting points and how well the curriculum is implemented in response to these. They ensure that no learning time is wasted. Teachers are well trained in how children learn and demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge across the curriculum. For example, phonics and mathematics teaching is precise and highly effective. Staff scaffold, model, extend and develop pupils' ideas consistently and with success. Staff are highly focused and determined in helping pupils to overcome any barriers or close gaps in key knowledge quickly. Consequently, adaptations to learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language, and for other disadvantaged pupils, are timely and personalised. Staff throughout the school help pupils to develop the confidence they need to engage in and talk about their learning successfully.

Ark Castledown Primary Academy

URN: 144083 | Inspected: 11 November 2025

Early years

Strong standard

The curriculum is very well designed so that children's knowledge and skills build cumulatively and securely. Provision for 3-year-olds is thoughtful and matched well to children's developmental needs. Effective partnership work with parents and carers helps staff to identify and build on children's early knowledge and starting points robustly. Expert staff create purposeful activities that support children's learning well. They listen and respond skilfully to children. Lessons are extremely well taught and supported by high-quality interactions. Staff rightly focus on language, relationships and vocabulary building. For example, staff use specific vocabulary intentionally, which children then know, understand and use in their everyday language.

The environment is carefully designed so that children access activities that develop foundational knowledge. Activities are intentional and strengthen children's understanding. For example, children practise key number skills daily. Reading through phonics is prioritised and taught knowledgeably. Pupils quickly get to grips with the knowledge they need to read and write. Overall, above-average proportions of children reach a good level of development. Disadvantaged children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are new to speaking English, receive the guidance and extra help they need to develop a clear understanding across the areas they need to make a successful move into Year 1.

Inclusion Exceptional

Castledown is an extremely inclusive school. Leaders adopt a highly determined, coordinated approach to support pupils with a wide range of needs. The whole staff team, external professionals and parents and carers work very well together to ensure that all pupils have a profound sense of belonging, especially when they join partway through the year. Staff quickly identify pupils' needs, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are experts in using the best strategies to reduce barriers and aid success. If a pupil finds any aspect of their learning difficult, their provision is changed to give them the tools, resources and strategies that they need to achieve both academically and personally. Communication and language development underpins all learning. Staff work with external agencies such as speech and language therapists to develop effective programmes of support for pupils. Leaders create a highly inclusive culture for all pupils. The pupil premium is used extremely effectively to remove any barrier to pupils being able to achieve, belong and thrive. This ranges from ensuring pupils can easily access extra-curricular clubs to providing additional help so that pupils achieve high standards by the end of key stage 2. Strong standard

Leadership and governance

Strong standard

Leaders work closely with governors and trustees to create a culture of high expectations and professionalism. Leaders at all levels have a sharp understanding of the school's effectiveness. They monitor its work closely and engage in constant, reflective practice to ensure the school's offer meets pupils' needs consistently well. This

Ark Castledown Primary Academy

URN: 144083 | Inspected: 11 November 2025

ensures that the school's many strengths are celebrated and that any areas for further development strengthen quickly. The effectiveness of leaders' actions can be seen clearly in the raised standards across the school, the highly consistent approach to teaching learning and curriculum and the precision with which the most vulnerable pupils are looked after. The school shares many aspects of its work nationally, both within ARK Schools trust and with other schools and trusts across the country. Leaders have established positive relationships across the school community. They know children and families very well. Leaders' clear focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has a significantly positive impact in the school's community overall. Staff develop detailed subject knowledge as a result of an extensive range of professional learning, mentoring and coaching provided by the school and academy trust. Staff repeatedly say they love working at the school. They feel very well supported with their workload and wellbeing. Personal development and well-being Strong standard The personal development programme brings together a range of thoughtful, connected experiences for pupils in highly effective ways. 'Life lessons', such as learning about managing money, are taught explicitly and help to prepare pupils for life beyond school. Pupils feel safe. They know about road safety, for example, and the immediate road risks around the school. Pupils develop detailed knowledge as a result of effective relationships and health education, including about the possible risks involved in using the internet. Pupils are inspired by the school's personal development programme. By undertaking a series of activities throughout their time in school, they connect increasingly with the wider world. This especially supports the most disadvantaged pupils' personal development and wellbeing. Pupils feel empowered to contribute to school life through responsibilities such as becoming school councillors and prefects. Pupils value the opportunities to connect with others and with culture and the arts. Pupils talk fondly about the memories they create at school, such as the Remembrance Day commemorations and the town's 'umbrella parade'. Numerous workshops and activities support artistic, musical, sporting and cultural development well. Pupils learn about the importance of respecting people's differences, as well as fundamental British values, through the curriculum and regular assemblies. Pupils develop a deep knowledge and understanding of their school values of eloquence, grit, responsibility, confidence, kindness and curiosity. They proudly demonstrate these values throughout their time in school. Pupils value staff at the school. They behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. Thorough record-keeping and data analysis help leaders ensure that pastoral support is effective. Leaders' monitoring of club attendance, for example, helps more pupils to benefit from the school's broad offer. Activities, including educational trips and visits, are purposeful, deliberate and have a clear, positive impact on pupils' personal development experiences.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils thrive at this highly inclusive school. They have a clear sense of belonging and feel safe. Pupils are confident and proud of their school. They especially enjoy making a difference in their community, for example through improving their allotment, performing in the Hastings carnival parade, or singing together with other schools in London. Pupils behave with integrity. They display positive attitudes towards staff and each other, and show respect to all. Playtimes and lunchtimes are vibrant and fun. Pupils play happily together. Bullying is rare but dealt with quickly if it ever happens. Pupils enjoy school and most attend regularly. If any pupils are at risk of lower attendance, they receive highly personalised and thoughtful pastoral care and support to help them attend more frequently. Children in early years, as well as pupils who join the school in later years, make a strong start, because staff have a deep understanding of the various barriers to learning and wellbeing that pupils may face.

Ark Castledown Primary Academy

URN: 144083 | Inspected: 11 November 2025

They are expert at identifying these barriers quickly, and begin reducing them right from the start. In particular, the school's highly consistent approach to ensuring that pupils develop strong communication and language skills is impressive. The school works closely with parents and external agencies to get the right help and support that pupils need to succeed. The curriculum is highly ambitious. It is taught consistently well so that pupils' knowledge and understanding deepens over time. The school's expert provision for reading and mathematics ensures that pupils, in particular disadvantaged pupils, achieve extremely well from their starting points. Pupils achieve well in other subjects too. Outcomes in national tests and examinations highlight how, by the end of key stage 2, pupils are very well prepared for their next stage of education.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue with their strategy and implementation of ensuring sustained high attendance for all pupils.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard

As a result of the school's highly effective work to promote regular attendance and positive behaviour, pupils flourish, feel welcome and develop a real sense of belonging.

The school's detailed and precise work with pupils and families results in notable improvements in attendance over time, and some rapid improvements for individuals. For example, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils attend more regularly than their peers nationally. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing because staff know pupils' barriers and work well to remove them, including the thoughtful use of external agencies. Several pupils leave the school during the year, for example when families move to other locations. The school does everything it can to check pupils' safe destinations. Pupils' behaviour is extremely positive. Pupils understand and respect deeply leaders' high expectations so that they demonstrate the school's values consistently well. Pupils who need it receive timely extra help to manage their emotions successfully. Staff help pupils to build self-esteem and social skills. Interactions throughout the school are extremely warm. Bullying is rare and not tolerated.

For detailed performance data including disadvantage gap analysis, historical trends, and comparison tables, visit the school's profile on WhatSchool:

<https://whatschool.ai/en/school/ark-castledown-primary-academy-hastings>