



Information for Prospective Chairs



Message from Sir Paul Marshall

Chair of trustees

Dear Prospective Chair

I am delighted that you are interested in becoming a Chair of governors at one of the Ark academies. As one of the country's highest performing academy networks, our schools have high aspirations for pupil outcomes. Our local governing bodies (LGBs) work in tandem with our trustee board and central teams to realise progress towards our mission that every child at one of our schools, regardless of their background or prior attainment, has real options by age 18: to move into further education or pursue a career of their choice.

Our Chairs and governors hold our Principals to account for the implementation of the school's educational and development plans. They use their skills and experience to support and enrich the school in a range of other ways — embedding and embodying the school's vision, values and ethos and building links with the community. We also encourage LGBs to share good ideas, lessons learned and feedback with other LGBs and our central teams.

In this booklet, you will find information about Ark, our governance structure and the role of Chair in leading the governing body. If you have any questions, please contact our Head of Governance Elizabeth.dawson@arkonline.org. We also warmly extend an invitation to you to visit one of our schools when you have the opportunity,

Yours sincerely,



Sir Paul Marshall,
Chair of Trustees



Why we're here

Education opens doors. It gives all children, whatever their background, the knowledge and confidence they need to succeed at school and beyond. We want all children to have a great education — and real choices in life.

Our network

In the UK we run a network of 38 schools educating over 20,000 pupils in four hubs — Birmingham, Hastings, London and Portsmouth — creating all-through or virtual all-through schools. All the Ark schools are situated in areas of high deprivation or educational need and our pupil profile reflects this: over half of our pupils are eligible for free school meals compared to 27% nationally, and 40% have English as an additional language. They are also more likely to have entered secondary school behind expected levels.

Each school in our network has its own ethos and character, but all share the same mission: to give every child the very best start in life so that, when the time comes, they're able to go on to university or the career of their choice. Some schools are brand-new ones that we built ourselves, while others are existing schools that joined our network to benefit from our support and expertise. If a school joins Ark, we will work alongside the staff so that, together, we can make the school the best it can be. As a network, we grow as quickly as we can but as slowly as necessary to ensure we never compromise on quality.

Track record

Our schools operate in challenging social contexts, with over half of our year 11 students eligible for Pupil Premium funding — double the national average. They are also more likely to be below the nationally expected level when joining secondary school. Despite this, our schools achieve great results:

- Ark Castledown Primary Academy is in the top 1% of the most improved schools in the country - increasing its Year 6 results by 46%. This is in addition to achieving results that are above

national in all areas, including Early Years and Phonics

- 93% of Ark pupils pass the phonics screening check 12 points above the 2017 national average
- The proportion of students who started secondary school behind but still went on to pass English & Maths GCSEs (17%) is x1.5 higher than the national average (11%)
- The proportion of our disadvantaged students passing English & Maths GCSEs (59%) is over a third higher than the national average (43%)
- In 2016-2017, 81% of Ark sixth-form students gained a place at university, 20% of these to Russell Group

We're proud that our schools have achieved some of the best results in the country. We're also proud of the Ark staff who have built environments where pupils can succeed. 84% of our schools which have been inspected by Ofsted are rated as good or outstanding, with 34% rated as outstanding compared to the national average of 21%.



Our Approach

Each of the Ark academies has its own distinctive character, reflecting its local community and history, but all share a commitment to the Ark six pillars.



High expectations

With the right teaching and support, we believe every child can realise their potential. We set exceptionally high expectations for all our pupils and do whatever it takes to achieve them. Our aspirations are no lower for our most vulnerable pupils.

Exemplary behaviour

Our schools are characterised by a respectful environment, where teachers can focus on teaching and pupils can focus on learning. We teach, recognise and reinforce good behaviour, and we do not tolerate poor behaviour. We don't accept any excuses, and we don't make any either.

Excellent teaching

A teacher affects a pupil's achievement more than any other factor. We work side by side with our teaching staff to ensure excellent teaching and support them with exceptional training and development. To ensure no child is left behind, we have developed data management tools which allow teachers to monitor pupils' progress and quickly identify when children, or indeed teaching staff, need extra support.

Depth before breadth

When pupils secure firm foundations in English and Mathematics, they find the rest of the curriculum far easier to access. That's why we prioritise depth in these subjects, giving pupils the best chance of academic success.

We've developed [Mathematics Mastery](#) and [English Mastery](#) which aim to improve attainment, enjoyment and confidence in Maths and English. Their approach is based on tried and tested methods from around the world, and is endorsed by Ofsted. Mathematics Mastery partners with over 500 schools outside Ark, and English Mastery is working with more than 60 schools.

Always learning

To make sure children have enough time both for core subjects and for extra-curricular activities, many of our schools run a longer school day. Others are open at weekends and during school holidays, offering masterclasses and revision sessions. Many Ark schools offer residential stays, day trips and summer schools. In every school, no time is wasted - every hour of every day is devoted to children learning.

Knowing every child

We organise our schools so that every child knows, and is known well by, every adult in the school.

We also recognise that children do best when families and schools work together. We keep parents well informed about their children's targets, and we involve families in all aspects of school life.

To nurture a love of reading and develop fluent communication skills, we also dedicate more time to literacy and English. We make sure that all of our teachers recognise the barriers that children face in building literacy skills, and we offer tools and expertise to enable teachers to best support pupils who need more help.

Our pupils

Irfan is a sixth form student at [Ark Globe Academy](#) in south London. He recently received a conditional offer to attend the [University of Oxford](#) to study geography. He is the third Ark Globe Sixth Form student in three years to receive an Oxbridge offer.



"I honestly had not expected to get the offer. I was refreshing my UCAS admissions page and it suddenly came right up on the screen: *"The University of Oxford has offered you a place to study geography"*. I remember that whole day afterwards I was shaking; it was a surreal moment for me. I didn't know what to feel; I was nervous, I was happy, I just had so many mixed emotions.

I have a really supportive family and my school, Ark Globe Academy, has always pushed me to succeed. Besides the academic support, Ark Globe offered us some amazing experiences and opportunities. Just in the last year for example, I have been a part of an award-winning student campaigning group based in Elephant and Castle, "Fight for Revite." I've been to Washington DC, and I've spoken in the House of Lords.

It's rare for students from my community to go to Oxbridge. I don't see that as a barrier but rather as motivation. I want to show the community here at Ark Globe, as well as the British-Bangladeshi community, that more people should apply and take advantage of this opportunity. I'm trying to open the doorway and inspire them to apply to universities like Oxbridge.

Whether I wind up at Oxford or another university, I definitely think that my place belongs here in south London and I plan to come back and keep up with the campaign and continue to work and fight for the things I believe in. I think everyone has to play a part in improving their community. This is my future. It's everyone's future."

The role of the Chair and the local governing body (LGB)

We believe that being a school governor is a rewarding role, and even more so for Chairs. It gives people a chance to give something back to their local communities and help young people thrive and access a wide range of opportunities, while supporting the Principal at a strategic level and leading a team of governors.

Overall Local Governing Body (LGB) purpose

Ark is a multi-academy trust, meaning that all of our schools are united in one organisation. The trustee board is the legally accountable body for every school, holding statutory responsibilities and scrutinising network-wide educational and financial plans. Our LGBs have no legal liability and work on behalf of the board to review and provide strategic input into plans and budgets, monitor alignment of school processes and reporting with overall strategy and policies, and embed the school's ethos and values. The remit of the LGB is clearly set out in the Decision Making Framework which is available on our website.

Each governing body consists of the Principal, Chair, two parents and a staff member. Ark then appoints additional skilled governors drawn from a range of backgrounds according to the school's priorities. Some LGBs may also include a representative of the local authority and the Diocese.

Ark believes that this model allows for strong, and focused local governance. Governors are dedicated solely to their school — this is the core of their value. By having a locally based, external sounding board with a range of skills and expertise, the school is supported by a group of governors who care passionately about the success of the school and its pupils.

With statutory responsibilities minimised, governors are empowered to concentrate on one absolute priority — enhancing life chances for all children in our schools.

Chair role and attributes

The LGB Chair has a pivotal role in the oversight and governance of an Ark school. The Chair will give more time and energy to the school, and have more insight into all aspects of its work, than any of the other governors. The Chair is responsible for leading the LGB and sets expectations that governors will engage with the school by attending school events, sitting on governor panels, or taking on a 'link governor' role in an area such as Safeguarding or a curriculum subject.

As well as leading governor engagement, the Chair will be supported by the Regional Director in working closely with the Principal to advise, challenge, help and mentor. The Chair will be involved in school strategic planning, planning for the long term and acting as the link from the trustee board to the school. The Chair is involved in the appointment and performance management process of Principals and advises on wider succession planning within the school. The Chair is also a powerful voice for the school within the wider Ark network, linking to the central team through regular 'Chairs Forums', the centrally managed clerking system and through regular meetings with the Regional Director.

An Ark Schools Chair is likely to have the following attributes:

- Clear alignment with the vision and ethos of Ark Schools

- Commitment to Ark Schools principles including high aspirations, closing the attainment gap, depth before breadth and knowing every child
- Commitment to the school's inclusive Church of England character (if appropriate)
- Experience of strategic direction and guidance
- Strong leadership and management skills
- Working knowledge of primary- or secondary-level education (as appropriate)
- Knowledge of or connections to industry, commerce or higher education, ideally in the school's local area
- Desire to guide their school to work collaboratively within the Ark Schools network

Support and training

As well as working with the Principal, each Chair has the support of the Regional Director who works across a number of schools and has responsibility for improving outcomes and ensuring financial and operational effectiveness. The Regional Director is a key contact for the Chair. On a day to day basis the Chair is supported by the clerk to the LGB and will also have regular contact with the Governance Officer for the region. This support is reinforced by advice and guidance from the Head of Governance for Ark Schools.

A full range of training is available to all governors, including Chair-specific modules. There is a regular Chairs' Forum which provides Chairs with updates on the Ark Schools network and an opportunity to be involved in shaping strategic planning as well peer to peer discussion.

Our Governors

Josie Verghese is a Senior Producer at the BBC. She became a governor at [Ark Walworth Academy](#) in South London six years ago.



“I’ve always been interested in education, but early on I knew I didn’t want to be a teacher. I’d never really thought about being a governor until some colleagues and friends mentioned it to me. I didn’t really know what being a governor involved. I don’t recall knowing who they were when I was at school and so I pictured a man in a suit, which certainly isn’t me! But I wanted to give back to my community so I started looking for schools on my patch.

I met with the Chair of Governors and as soon as we spoke, I think he got the sense of how my local community connection and career involvement with young people could add an alternative voice. When I started to look into it, the values behind Ark resonated with me. Particularly, Ark’s commitment to working with young people in some of the more deprived areas of the country struck a chord. Ark strives towards providing these young people with not just education but the opportunities and enrichment to empower them beyond the classroom.

It’s hard to explain what a governor does because as your connection to the school grows, your position evolves. Generally, I describe my role as being a critical friend to the school – there to support but also challenge. Personally it is really important that I’m also a recognisable face so that the pupils and staff feel I am more directly connected with them and our local community, rather than having a governor who just parachutes in for meetings.

Being able to support those working in schools and empowering our young people is really important to me. There’s no template or blueprint of what a governor should be. You don’t need to know loads about education or business necessarily. I think the most important thing is that there’s diversity within the group of governors to provide a range of voices, perspectives and expertise. So, a governor can be a man in a suit, but it can also be someone like me. Someone who just really cares about their community and wants to play a little part in enriching the lives of the young people within it.”

Commitment

The average time commitment for a Chair is approximately 2 days per month but this is not necessarily time spent in school. It encompasses the following activities:

- Meetings with the Principal and/or Regional Director
- Reading and preparation for four two-hour LGB meetings each academic year and one strategy meeting
- Interviewing and assisting with the induction of new members of the LGB
- Attendance at school events to ensure good governor visibility
- Being a member of governor panels such as for exclusion reviews
- Supporting Ofsted inspections including meeting with the inspector
- Ark Schools commitments including Chairs Forums and training

Appointment process

The Chair of Governors is appointed by Lucy Heller (CEO) on behalf of the board, and will be provided with a structured induction and ongoing one-to-one support. The appointment process will involve the following stages:

- Initial interview to explore the role and the candidate's suitability
- Meeting with current Chair
- School visit and meeting with the Principal to learn more about the school
- A formal interview will be held with a member of the Ark Schools senior leadership team prior to appointment

All Ark Chairs and governors are required to adhere to the Ark governors' Code of Conduct, undergo an enhanced disclosure DBS check and make an annual Declaration of Interest. This may require you to withdraw from specific discussions where you, a partner or close relative or associate stands to gain or where you are so close to a matter being discussed that it will be difficult for you to be impartial.

We hope that this gives you a good flavour of what it means to be a Chair at an Ark School. For information about current Chair vacancies please visit www.arkonline.org or contact our Head of Governance at Elizabeth.dawson@arkonline.org