

Martins Wood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117285
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379387
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2012
Lead inspector	Norma Ball

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	493
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sharon Heraty
Headteacher	Tom Evans
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2007
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Norma Ball	Additional inspector
Paul Barraclough	Additional inspector
Raminder Arora	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 17 lessons and observed a range of small groups withdrawn from classes. A total of 16 teachers were observed together with short observations of learning support assistants teaching working with small groups. Inspectors made visits to classes to look at displays and observe individual pupils and groups at work, and to listen to pupils read. Parents and carers were met informally during the inspection. Meetings with the headteacher, teaching staff, members of the governing body and pupils also took place. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised samples of pupils' work, teachers' planning, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress, and documentation relating to management, curriculum and safeguarding. In addition, the inspectors took account of responses to questionnaires from 175 parents and carers, 44 staff and 101 pupils.

Information about the school

Martins Wood is a much larger than average primary school. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Less than one fifth of pupils are from minority ethnic heritages and of these, a smaller than average proportion speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities including those with a statement is lower than average. Their needs are predominantly related to speech and language development and also behavioural needs. There is a morning and afternoon Nursery class and three Reception classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school has met the current government's floor standards for academic performance.

The school has achieved a number of awards including Active Mark, Arts Mark and ICT Mark awards. The governing body manage the Tree Tops Breakfast and After School Clubs. The school has begun a planned expansion programme to admit three forms of entry to match the rising local population as new housing is developed nearby. As part of this progressive expansion senior leaders and managers are engaged in a phased programme of restructuring their roles and responsibilities. The number of pupils leaving and joining the school through the year has increased rapidly as a result of local housing developments and family moves within the Stevenage area.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school in which all pupils achieve well. Support, for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is carefully planned and good.
- All pupils make good progress from their individual starting points including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the growing numbers of pupils who join the school at different stages. Attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 is average. Pupils' progress is good but attainment remains average as it is affected by the frequently changing characteristics of classes as pupils join and leave the school.
- Good teaching ensures that pupils work well and are enthusiastic about their learning. Targets are set for each class in literacy and numeracy but some opportunities are missed to set individual targets for all pupils and so develop their independence and accelerate their progress.
- Pupils' progress is tracked carefully through the school. Progress information is used effectively to plan interesting lessons that engage and motivate pupils. Teachers are inconsistent in setting tasks that always challenge pupils of higher ability.
- Behaviour is typically good and pupils feel safe in school. Almost half of the pupils who responded to the questionnaire did not think behaviour in school was good. The inspectors followed up these concerns and found that the school has a happy and industrious ethos. When behaviour was discussed with groups of pupils they expressed favourable views.
- Teaching and curriculum have a positive impact on pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- The headteacher gives the school ambitious and committed leadership. Leaders and managers have accurately evaluated the school's performance and have implemented initiatives which have succeeded in securing good achievement for all groups of pupils. Planning of the expansion of the school is thorough.

- A very large majority of parents and carers are satisfied or very satisfied with all aspects of their children's experience of school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement in English and mathematics by sharing existing good practice to ensure that planned activities in lessons are sufficiently challenging for all groups of pupils, especially the more able.
- Develop pupils' independence further by involving them in setting their own targets with their teacher and reviewing their progress in English and mathematics by December 2012.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' academic achievement is good. Pupils enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and abilities that are below those of children of a similar age, especially in their language skills and their understanding of numbers. They make good progress in all areas of their learning and enter Year 1 with skills and abilities that are broadly as expected for their age. Good progress continues through the school but this is not apparent in pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 which is average. This is because in recent years the number of pupils who leave and join the school at different stages has increased. Pupils who replace those who leave to move to other schools have a range of skills and abilities which are, in many cases, lower or much lower than their peers. The schools' own tracking information, pupils' work and inspection evidence indicate that all pupils, at whatever stage they join the school, make good progress and achieve well. This is because they are well taught and have a stimulating curriculum that helps extend their literacy and numeracy skills well.

Pupils' good attitudes to learning make a strong contribution to their good achievement. They enjoy their lessons, want to do well and settle to their tasks quickly. One pupil, typical of many, explained this saying, 'All the teachers are fair and we have fun things to do in lessons and clubs and we love learning things.' Pupils' speaking and listening skills are developed well in whole-class discussions and when they share ideas with their learning partners. Achievement in English is improving because pupils' vocabulary is systematically developed and there are good opportunities to extend their writing skills in interesting themes and topics. Pupils' reading skills at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are broadly average and are regularly monitored and assessed in all classes. Pupils appreciate the good range of reading books available for them to select and read in school or at home. Pupils' skills are developed systematically in mathematics, especially in problem-solving, and their achievement is improving as a result.

Pupils' progress is tracked accurately through the school. This information is used very effectively to plan tasks that motivate and challenge the majority of pupils but opportunities are sometimes missed to offer full challenge to the most able and accelerate their progress further. Pupils with special educational needs make good and sometimes better progress from their individual starting points. This is because they receive a range of flexible and effective support, both in and out of lessons, based on accurate assessment of their needs. Parents and carers of all pupils, who expressed a view, are justifiably pleased with the progress their children make.

Quality of teaching

Pupils and their parents and carers value the good quality of teaching in the school. Lessons proceed at a good pace and capture the interest of pupils so they are keen to learn. The purpose of lessons is explained clearly and teachers use questioning effectively to assess pupils' understanding as well as to encourage them to explain and explore their ideas orally. Interesting tasks are set, based upon teachers' good subject knowledge, to extend pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics; these are developed progressively through the school. Number skills and using numbers in problem-solving tasks are also developed well and having a positive impact on achievement. Teaching is strongest in Years 2, 5 and 6 where expectations are high and work is carefully structured to meet the needs of all pupils effectively. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, for example, problem-solving tasks based upon percentage calculations were well planned to meet the needs of different ability groups. Rapid preliminary revision tasks for some pupils helped them settle confidently to their independent work.

Teachers make good opportunities to develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, for example, children enjoyed finding out about artistic, culinary and cultural elements of China as part of their work on the Chinese New Year. Teachers mark work regularly and provide feedback for pupils, which is mostly verbal. Class targets are set for all pupils in English and mathematics which are reviewed and revised regularly. However, about a quarter of pupils who replied to the questionnaire did not feel they knew how well they were doing or that adults explained how to improve their work. They were not always clear about their class targets. Older pupils, in particular, did regard the individual targets sometimes set for them in their books, as very helpful. Teachers promote strong independence in developing pupils' discussion skills but this is not effectively developed to encourage them to be involved in setting their personal targets and reviewing their own progress carefully with their teacher so they know how well they are doing and what they need to learn next.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A very large majority of parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire think behaviour is good. Inspection evidence confirms that behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. School data and the comments of pupils indicate the behaviour code, which pupils helped design, is well integrated in the school and respected. A few pupils can present challenging behaviour but this is well

managed by staff. Small incidents of unacceptable behaviour, whether in class or in the playground, are dealt with quickly and fairly and the school has a happy and vibrant ethos. Pupils work well together and the vast majority show respect and kindness to each other and to all adults. During the inspection a number of pupils were consulted about behaviour and bullying because of the negative response to this section of the pupils' questionnaire. They were unanimous in stating that the school was a happy place, incidents of name-calling and aggression were rare. Pupils respect the warning card system used and know they are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour, how it affects other people, and how they can make their school a happy place in which to work and learn. This ethos was reinforced well in assembly when pupils were invited to reflect on the theme of belonging and how this concept involved care, respect and kindness to others. Attendance is average and a strong focus for the school. The careful monitoring of attendance and rapid follow-up of any concerns, is leading to a steady improvement in the rate of attendance.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides highly committed and ambitious leadership and is ably supported by determined and energetic deputy headteachers. Together they unite staff in a drive to continue to improve achievement further for all pupils. The challenges posed by the phased development of the school to three forms of entry are being addressed systematically and carefully. The roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers are being revised and are focused on evolving a team approach, based on key stages or phases, led by phase leaders. They are embracing change with enthusiasm although some areas of the new structure are still in the embryonic stage. The school has evaluated its effectiveness in all areas accurately with clear areas for development identified and this is now being translated to the school development plan. Leaders monitor provision regularly and areas for improvement are clearly identified. Feedback is given to individuals or whole staff, and clear points for development are identified and followed-up to ensure improvements are made. These and the improvements in achievement and rates of attendance demonstrate that there is a good capacity for further improvement.

The governing body knows the school well and offers increasing challenge as new members gain skills and experience to share their responsibilities with their colleagues. They are playing a greater part in strategic planning and review with growing skill the progress and attainment of pupils. They have been closely involved in plans to enlarge the school and the Chair of Governors maintains a close involvement in this and other developments through regular attendance at senior management team meetings. Arrangements to ensure pupils' safeguarding and their health and safety are rigorous and regularly reviewed. Policies and procedures are well integrated in the school and staff training is updated efficiently. The school works well to involve parents and carers in their children's education beginning with home and some pre-school visits in Nursery and Reception. Termly consultations evenings and information sessions related to the curriculum provide parents and carers with good information about their child's work in class and the progress they are making.

The curriculum is very broad and balanced and provides a wealth of experiences for

pupils of all abilities. The creative development of pupils is an excellent feature of the curriculum; there are many artistic, musical and dramatic opportunities. Also noteworthy is the planned development of pupils' basic skills in other curricular subjects. Carefully selected strategies to improve achievement in English and mathematics are proving successful because they are well monitored by leaders and managers to ensure they are effective. Pupils confirm that the school offers them a good range of learning experiences, including a wide variety of clubs and interesting visits and visitors. All pupils are known and valued as individuals and equality of opportunity is promoted well for all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs. The curriculum makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development alongside the extension of their academic skills. In lessons and assemblies pupils' social skills are developed effectively and they are encouraged to reflect on moral and ethical issues such as fairness and the need to protect the environment. Other cultures, both ancient and modern are discussed as in their work on Ancient Egypt which was extended to look at life in the modern state of Egypt. Parents and carers are also encouraged to participate by sharing their skills or information about their cultural heritages and have recently contributed to pupils' awareness of Judaism. Pupils and their parents and carers value their learning experiences and have a clear perception of their safety in school.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Martins Wood Primary School, Stevenage, SG1 5RT

Thank you for the friendly way you welcomed us to your school recently and for completing the questionnaires. I would like to say a special thank you to those of you who met with us to share your views. You were very helpful.

You told us that Martins Wood is a good school and we agree with you. Your headteacher, other staff and the governing body work well together to make your school a happy place in which to learn. Your teachers and other adults in school are successful in making sure that you are able to learn well. We were impressed to see how much you enjoy your lessons, and you told us that you find learning fun because your teachers make your lessons interesting. You get on together and behave well. You know a lot about being safe and healthy and you are well cared for by all adults.

We have suggested two things which would help to make your school even better.

- We have asked your teachers to make sure they use what they know about the progress you are making to plan lessons and tasks that really make you think hard, especially those of you who find learning easy.
- To ensure that you know how well you are doing, we have asked your teachers to work with you to set your own targets and then discuss how and what you need to do next to improve. This will help you to make even better progress.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and doing your best at school. It was a great pleasure to visit Martins Wood Primary School and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Norma Ball
Lead inspector

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