

Martins Wood Primary School

Mildmay Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 5RT

Inspection dates

6–7 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies too widely across the school. Some teachers do not maintain high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Governors' grasp of achievement information is not sufficiently detailed to hold school leaders fully to account.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in reading are not yet high throughout the school. Systems to tackle this underachievement are new and their impact is not yet known by leaders.
- Not enough is expected of the most-able pupils. Pupils are not always expected to work hard or given sufficient opportunities to deepen their thinking, so they can excel.
- The quality of mathematics' teaching is not always consistent across year groups, leading to too much variation in achievement in this subject.
- Teachers do not routinely use their assessment information effectively to move pupils on fast enough in their learning. Pupils rely too often on adult direction.
- The achievement of pupils in phonics (the linking of sounds and letters) in Key Stage 1 is limited when pupils revisit too much of this work in the autumn term.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are happy, safe and secure in a well-cared for environment. Behaviour is good. Pupils and parents are proud of their school.
- New middle leaders are passionate and committed to improving outcomes for pupils. New systems are starting to have an impact.
- The provision in the early years is good. The early years' leader ensures that all children settle well. They make rapid progress from the start.
- School leaders and teachers provide well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise outcomes by:
 - accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils in the school, particularly in reading
 - providing interesting and challenging opportunities for the most-able pupils to excel
 - ensuring that a larger proportion of pupils achieve at least national expectations in the phonics screening check at Year 1, by 2016
 - ensuring that more pupils achieve the national expectation in mathematics by the end of 2016.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all pupils make faster progress, by:
 - ensuring consistency in planning and higher expectations of all pupils
 - using assessments to refine teaching and learning activities to meet the needs of groups of pupils
 - providing pupils with the opportunity to deepen and extend their mathematical skills by planning interesting and challenging lessons that allow pupils to think, explore and work hard.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that performance management targets are precise, so that leaders can hold staff fully to account for the progress of pupils
 - having clear roles and responsibilities within the leadership team, so that leaders are fully accountable for the impact of their work
 - address the inconsistencies in teaching and learning across the school
 - ensuring that leaders and governors measure the impact of the pupil premium grant and hold school leaders more stringently to account for the provision and achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

An external review of governance should be undertaken on order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Although self-evaluation is accurate, it does not focus sufficiently on the areas that will bring about better outcomes for pupils, particularly for the disadvantaged and the most able. Consequently, the expectation of progress for some pupils is not consistently high, and performance management targets are too broad.
- School leaders do not evaluate the impact of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils with sufficient rigour. The responsibility for monitoring the performance of these pupils lies with too many staff. As a result, a minority of disadvantaged pupils do not make accelerated gains in their learning, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Changes to subject leadership are very new and have yet to demonstrate impact in developing the curriculum. Roles and responsibilities have not been defined clearly enough to ensure that the learning across all subjects interests and challenges pupils sufficiently well.
- The headteacher has ensured that the school is warm and welcoming. The recent expansion to the building has been thoughtfully designed and provides a high quality environment in which pupils can learn. Pupils are respectful and take care of their school.
- New leadership in Key Stage 1 is making a difference. Regular meetings with staff ensure that the communication and feedback to adults is developing. Consequently, there is now a greater focus on improving the outcomes for pupils.
- The leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage is a strength of the school. Teachers in new pre-school, Nursery and Reception classes plan learning effectively and children are developing their skills of independence well. As a result, children make rapid progress.
- Leaders ensure that transition is effectively planned for pupils who require additional support when moving to secondary school. Parents of children joining the school in Reception commented on the supportive approach to starting school that helped their children settle well.
- New staff to the school observe school policies regarding feedback to pupils, ensuring that this aspect of the school's work is strong and consistent. Pupils are now benefiting from more useful feedback that helps them make better progress in lessons.
- School leaders promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils effectively. This results in older pupils participating with enthusiasm in musicals and plays – confidently presenting to large audiences of parents and pupils. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is available to all pupils to ensure equality of opportunity.
- The local authority has been over-generous in its overall assessment of the school's performance. However, the local authority has provided for training for staff at the school and this has been well received. Newly qualified teachers are well supported by the local authority.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are not sufficiently aware of the outcomes of groups of pupils, and particularly of disadvantaged pupils throughout the school. As a result, they are unable to challenge school leaders rigorously about the use of the additional funds that the school receives or check these pupils' progress well enough.
 - Governors understand the information the school has regarding the performance of pupils, but they do not hold the school leaders to account for improving the educational experience of pupils in the school stringently enough. Consequently, the school's view of its own performance is over-generous.
 - Safeguarding policies and practices are in place, but governors do not check on their implementation sufficiently well enough. This results in some of these policies being out of date, failing to reflect changes of expectations nationally.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders and managers ensure that pupils are safe and staff are trained well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning across the school is variable. In some classes, teachers do not always expect enough of their pupils which results in a lack of challenge, particularly for the most-able. This is in

contrast to other classes, where teachers provide interesting and stimulating activities so pupils can practise their skills and deepen their understanding.

- Although improvements in the curriculum are recent, there are early signs that pupils are benefiting from practising their literacy skills in other subjects. In some books, pupils produced diary entries and biographies in history, deepening their knowledge of historical facts while developing their writing skills. Where teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write using their experiences, for example following a recent school trip, the pupils draft their work with care and attention, choosing appropriate vocabulary.
- Teaching staff who are new to the school have quickly adopted the school's policy for feedback and marking and pupils understand what is expected of them. Feedback and marking are consistent across the school and pupils are making faster progress as a result of focused targets.
- Many pupils spoke about their enjoyment of science lessons. Evidence from a scrutiny of their work in science demonstrates that pupils take care in their presentation and adults ensure that they have practical opportunities to develop their scientific skills. Consequently, pupils make good progress in science. The school's assessment results for Key Stage 2 in 2015 show that more pupils achieved higher levels in science than in writing.
- The teaching of physical education is effective in the school. Specifically employed coaches, provided from the additional sports funding, work alongside the teachers to ensure that pupils are active and practising their skills. In one lesson, pupils were able to show how well they improved their understanding and performance of dance sequences because of the clear direction and expectation set by the sports coach.
- The use of teaching assistants is effective in the school. They are used to support individuals and groups both in class and also for additional support outside the classroom. In one observation the teaching assistant used effective questioning skills to help the pupils develop their vocabulary for writing. Subsequently these pupils were able to confidently produce a good piece of descriptive writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They speak confidently and positively about their school. They settle to work quickly and consequently there are few incidents of poor behaviour. The majority of pupils are happy at school.
- Pupils feel safe and parents agree. Pupils learn about keeping safe through assemblies.
- Pupils understand the rules at school for using the internet and as a result they are able to keep themselves safe.
- The support offered by teaching assistants ensures that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well cared for, developing confidence in their skills and abilities. As a result, they make good progress across all areas of the curriculum.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils move around the school sensibly and well. Most pupils look after their equipment in lessons; older pupils are encouraged to take a pride in the presentation of their work, responding well to the challenge. At play, pupils have positive interactions with each other. As a result, pupils are able to learn in a happy environment.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying. They trust that if bullying were to occur, it would be dealt with well by the adults. School records indicate that incidents of bullying and racism are rare and dealt with promptly.
- Attendance is broadly in line with national expectations. Case studies show that staff keep track of pupils with poor attendance and deal effectively with unauthorised absence.
- In some lessons the most-able pupils do not always have the opportunity to extend their thinking and skills. This results in them having to wait for the next activity because they have finished. Consequently, they are not fully developing resilience and perseverance in learning.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Children enter Reception with levels of achievement that are generally typical for children of their age. They make good progress and the proportion of children securing a good level of development is above the national average. Children are well prepared for Year 1.
- In 2015, the proportions of Year 1 pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics check was below the national average. The school's own evidence shows that previously pupils spent too much time revisiting previous learning before being given the opportunity to make accelerated progress. The leaders for Key Stage 1 are tackling this issue, with early signs of improved impact in results. The proportion of pupils who catch up by the end of Year 2 has risen due to the additional support given by teachers.
- Standards by the end of Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with national averages for reading and mathematics, which has been sustained over a number of years. Pupils read widely and often and make good gains in their reading from low starting points.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015, only a small minority of pupils achieved the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Both attainment and progress in mathematics are lower than that expected nationally for pupils of their age. Lessons seen during the inspection show that the standard of teaching in mathematics is variable and pupils' progress remains inconsistent across Key Stage 2.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is not analysed well enough by school leaders. Although gaps in attainment are slowly closing in mathematics for disadvantaged pupils, progress is still below that expected nationally. In reading, in 2015, the gaps in achievement widened across the school. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who reached the expected level in reading is lower than the rest of their classmates and less than expected nationally at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Systems to tackle this underachievement are new but there are early signs that the additional targeted support that these pupils are receiving is helping them make accelerated progress.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs generally make good progress from their individual starting points. Their achievement is tracked well, with additional support given so pupils can achieve their potential. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are able to read fluently, use their sounds to help them and answer questions about the text to demonstrate their understanding well.
- Achievement in reading has remained static for a number of years at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Although pupils read widely and often from a range of fiction and non-fiction books from the reading scheme, they are not experiencing enough reading across all subject areas, to increase their interest and develop an enjoyment of books. As a result, insufficient numbers of pupils are making better than expected progress through the school.

Early years provision

is good

- Leadership of the early years is a strength. The early years' provision now includes the new pre-school, which is well attended and ensures that the needs of the children are provided for exceptionally well. The established routines and a wide range of activities help the children get off to 'a flying start' in all the early years' classes. Adults respond sensitively to children's needs. Parents told inspectors that the transition into classes has been handled very well and their children have settled quickly. Most children seen in Reception proudly showed their sticker demonstrating their success in being independent at the start of the school day.
- Adults use clear explanations so that children are taught well in the early years. In one writing lesson, a small group of children were practising their letter formation in the air before trying out their skills on paper. The children followed the instructions carefully so that they were successful when writing their letters. They enjoyed using terms such as 'anticlockwise' correctly and were praised for doing so.
- Children persevere, share and develop their friendships well through the many open-ended tasks they experience. In one lesson, children worked together to make a construction from boxes. They spoke well with each other during the ideas stage; each contributed to the making of their design and proudly and carefully carried it to show the adults.
- During the inspection there was clear evidence of progress seen from the Nursery in the development of phonics skills and developing writing. Adults intervene in a timely way to deepen children's understanding of names and numbers. Consequently, children are confident and able to explain in detail about their activities and their learning. They are making good progress.

- At times, adults give explanations too quickly to children rather than asking a question. As a result, some children do not have every opportunity to develop their speaking, listening and understanding.

School details

Unique reference number	117285
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10005495

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	677
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sharon Heraty
Headteacher	Tom Evans
Telephone number	01438 222602
Website	www.martinswood.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@martinswood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 January 2012

Information about this school

- Martins Wood is a significantly larger-than-average primary school.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is well below average, but increasing over time.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and looked after children.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- A pre-school, managed by the school, opened in April 2015.
- The school runs a breakfast and after school club.
- Children in the Nursery attend part time. Children in the Reception classes attend full time.
- There are seven newly qualified teachers.
- The school meets the government's current national floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching. This included observing learning in 40 lessons, 11 of which were jointly seen with senior leaders.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils, and scrutinised books to take account of the work that has been done and the progress that pupils make.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) was observed.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the school council.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation around safeguarding and scrutinised the single central register. The arrangements for pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs were also considered.
- The inspectors spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day. Parental views were gathered and analysed from the 167 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Staff views were considered through a questionnaire.

Inspection team

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