

Martins Wood Primary School

Mildmay Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 5RT

Inspection dates

14–15 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Pupils are now making better progress from their starting points as a result.
- Governance has improved since the previous inspection. Governors now have a more secure understanding of what the school does well and what still needs to improve.
- Pupils make very strong progress in reading in both key stages. Leaders have effectively prioritised this subject as an area for improvement.
- The most able pupils are making the progress of which they are capable in writing. The proportion of pupils who worked at the higher standard in 2017, in key stage 2, was above the national average.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported well. These pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The quality of provision in the early years continues to be a strength of the school. Children achieve well and are well prepared for their start in Year 1.
- Leaders provide pupils with rich learning experiences and opportunities. Reading, French and music are taught particularly well and most pupils make good progress in these subjects.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and at playtime. They are eager to learn and have positive attitudes to their work. Pupils are confident and respectful.
- Pupils receive clear guidance from adults on how to improve their work in English and mathematics so they now make rapid progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make enough progress from their starting points in writing. The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in key stage 2 was below that of other pupils nationally.
- The progress pupils make in subjects other than English and mathematics remains too varied. Pupils of different abilities do not yet receive the precise support and challenge they need to excel. Middle leaders are not yet fully effective across all subjects.
- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can learn in mathematics are not high enough. Some adults do not use the information they have about pupils' abilities well to plan learning that meets their needs. Pupils do not yet make consistent and rapid progress in key stage 2.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in mathematics to raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that teachers:
 - consistently use the newly-introduced strategies and evaluate their impact on the progress that groups of pupils make
 - adjust their teaching, when required, to meet all pupils' needs so pupils can make rapid and sustained progress.
- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - middle leaders ensuring that pupils make rapid and sustained progress in more subjects across the curriculum
 - adults ensuring that the needs of different abilities are met in subjects other than English and mathematics so pupils can make the good progress of which they are capable.
- Continue to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make at least good progress, particularly in writing so more consistently achieve the expected and higher national standards by the end of key stage 2.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have successfully improved teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection, so it is more consistent and of good quality. Pupils are making better progress as a result. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have clear plans and capacity for continuing to improve further.
- Leaders use effective systems regularly to check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They provide professional training and guidance for staff so that everyone is involved in school improvement and reaching the goals set in the school plan. Leaders have addressed areas where the quality of teaching has been weaker. As a result, they have a secure picture of individual staff training needs and how best to ensure that pupils make the best progress possible.
- All staff who responded to their questionnaire state that the school is better than at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers, including those newly qualified, told inspectors that they appreciate the support they receive for their professional development.
- Leaders continue to introduce new approaches and strategies so pupils can make rapid progress. This term, they have renewed the way that teachers give feedback. Leaders have ensured that their high expectations have been consistently implemented throughout the school, to promote good progress in mathematics and English learning.
- Leaders have continued to offer a vibrant and rich curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 4 have the opportunity to learn the ukulele, flute or violin. Many pupils continue to learn musical instruments later in their school lives. Pupils have the chance to play their musical instruments together and enjoy music when participating in the school orchestra.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is enriched further by inviting local people to work with pupils in art, science and computing. Drama is valued by the school and pupils enjoy participating in high-quality productions. Leaders employ specialist staff to teach French lessons. Pupils often reach high standards in foreign languages. However, leaders recognise that currently pupils do not make as much progress in other subjects, such as science, as they do in English and mathematics.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics use a consistent approach to checking the progress that pupils make. They check the accuracy of teachers' assessment and the quality of learning that is offered to pupils of different abilities. However, this leadership approach is not yet used effectively in all other subjects across the curriculum.
- Pupils have a good understanding of British values. Inspectors saw work about Diwali, Stonehenge and Remembrance Sunday during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke to a pupil who had visited the Cenotaph in London at the weekend. These examples illustrate the effective work in the school to develop pupils to be good members of their community.
- Leaders also provide many other opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual,

moral, social and cultural learning in lessons, in assembly and during breakfast club.

- Leaders use additional pupil premium funding increasingly effectively. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from a range of strategies to improve attendance and make their learning enjoyable. Funding is also used to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have an equal opportunity to attend school visits, receive support to help fill gaps in their understanding and attend the vast number of extra-curricular activities available. However, leaders have not ensured that the additional funds help pupils make even faster progress in writing. This remains an area for improvement for school leaders.
- Leaders have introduced new approaches to teaching mathematics across the school in order to increase pupils' progress. These plans have been introduced this year and it is too soon to assess the impact of their actions. Leaders plan to review the impact of these practices regularly to ensure that pupils leave the school with mathematical skills that are appropriate for their age.
- Primary PE and sport premium is used well to improve staff's ability and confidence to teach physical education. It has also been used to extend the range of activities pupils are offered beyond the school day. These activities are extremely popular and attended by the majority of pupils.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are supported successfully so that they can access their learning as part of the class. The special educational needs coordinator focuses on individual support and is determined to find 'a solution for every child'. The funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is used effectively to provide targeted teaching which is helping these pupils make good progress.
- Leaders provide a breakfast club, after-school care and, most recently, holiday activities. Pupils of all primary ages can attend this provision and inspectors saw them enjoying a range of academic, creative and social activities. Parents enjoy the opportunity to liaise with staff at the start and end of the school day.
- The school receives highly effective support from the local authority. This has ensured that leaders have identified and addressed the correct priorities.

Governance of the school

- Governors have undertaken a review of their own effectiveness since the previous inspection. Consequently, they now have an improved understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Governors have developed a good range of skills and an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Governors share leaders' drive to offer a breadth of experiences in school while still ensuring that pupils acquire the skills in English and mathematics that are needed for pupils' future success. Their vision is to 'deliver an outstanding experience for every pupil who walks through the door'.
- Minutes of meetings demonstrate that governors challenge leaders to ensure that they fully understand the information that school leaders give them. However, on occasions governors do not always check this information to satisfy themselves that it is accurate.
- Governors meet their statutory duties, including their responsibility for ensuring that the school keeps pupils safe and well cared for.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff training for child protection is up to date, as are all safety arrangements. Leaders have thorough risk assessments in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe and adults review processes and practices effectively.
- A few parents expressed concern about the security of the school's boundaries, including the pedestrian access. Leaders have rightly identified the need to prioritise this aspect of the school site. They have clear and robust systems in place to ensure that pupils are safe.
- The school is vigilant in checking the suitability of any adult who is likely to work with the pupils. Records are kept to a high standard. The school ensures that work with external agencies is effective in ensuring that the safety and well-being needs of all pupils are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the previous inspection. This is because leaders have eradicated weaker teaching and through their regular monitoring leaders have ensured great consistency and good quality across the school.
- Teachers have a detailed understanding of pupils' aptitudes and circumstances. They have supportive relationships with their pupils and aim to do the best for them. Staff question pupils' understanding and encourage them to think for themselves. As a result of adults' high expectations of pupils' behaviour, lessons run smoothly and learning proceeds easily.
- Pupils demonstrate a pride in their work. Their written work is very well presented and many persevere with the activities they are set. Pupils are keen to read their work to others and inspectors saw older pupils confidently using an accurate and wide range of technical of language. Teachers make sure that pupils use correct grammar and punctuation when writing at length. For most pupils, their books demonstrate good progress in writing and pupils use the skills they learn in English successfully in other subjects.
- Teachers use their knowledge of what pupils have achieved in English to shape learning for the next day. This means that most pupils usually make good progress from their starting points. However, this approach is not as effective in the teaching of mathematics as it is in English. Consequently, some pupils are not yet reaching the standards of which they are capable in mathematics. Newly introduced strategies for teaching mathematics require further time before the impact on accelerating pupils' progress can be assessed.
- Teaching assistants are deployed well and are effective in supporting pupils' development. They work closely with teachers to plan the help they provide.
- French, music and physical education (PE) are taught by specialist staff alongside the class teachers. In these subjects, pupils make very strong progress. They receive guidance on how to improve their learning and as result often reach higher standards.

However, in other subjects, particularly science and humanities, pupils are taught knowledge but not the skills that they need to deepen their understanding further. Consequently, in these subjects pupils' progress is less consistent and secure.

- Parents and carers receive clear information about how well their child is doing. The school runs parent workshops which show parents the sorts of activities which will help pupils with their learning at home. In the parental questionnaire, Parent View, 92% of respondents agree that their children are taught well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils of all ages are confident learners. They are enthusiastic about their learning and answer questions willingly. Pupils encourage each other to do well, celebrating when others achieve well.
- Pupils show respect and consideration towards adults and each other. They shared with inspectors that racist comments are not tolerated in school and that bullying is rare. They have confidence that adults will deal with any concerns promptly and well. Leaders' records of incidents confirm this.
- Pupils are taught well about how to keep themselves safe. Those who spoke with inspectors were less clear about keeping themselves safe when using the computer or online safety. However, inspectors saw posters pupils had produced, around the school, demonstrating the promotion of e-safety.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils generally demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning in most classes. Pupils' presentation of work is of a consistently high standard throughout the school.
- Pupils in both key stages play well together and care about each other. Year 6 pupils choose to support children in the nursery with reading, sport and with developing social skills. Pupils are provided with a range of activities outside, which encourages respectful play.
- Pupils are polite and respectful around the school and in lessons. They conduct themselves sensibly and follow firmly established routines. Occasionally, they need reminders to follow instructions in lessons. They respond quickly so that learning is not further interrupted.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and, as a result, most attend school regularly. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Attendance of disadvantaged pupils is below that of their classmates. However, the school is taking appropriate action to address this by offering effective support and guidance to families.
- The majority of parents, pupils and staff agree that behaviour is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' achievement continues to improve since the previous inspection. The progress that pupils made in key stage 2 in 2017 was broadly in line with the national average in reading and writing. More pupils attained the expected standard in reading and writing, which was a further improvement on the previous academic year.
- Disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 from all starting points, including the most able, made more progress in 2017 than they had done in previous years. Their progress in reading was particularly impressive. This was as a result of the school's renewed focus in this area of learning. It exceeded that of their classmates and of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. However, in writing and mathematics, they still did not perform as well as the other pupils nationally.
- The most able pupils made strong progress in writing and reading compared with those nationally, but in mathematics they made similarly low progress to that of their peers.
- While the proportion of pupils in Year 6 who attained the expected standard in mathematics improved by the end in 2017, it still remained lower than other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress in mathematics was lower from their starting points when compared with the national average.
- The proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching expected standards has continued to rise since the previous inspection. There is now a greater proportion of pupils than found nationally, who work at greater depth in their learning.
- A very large majority of Year 1 pupils have achieved the expected standard in the national phonics screening check for the last two years and demonstrates a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils use correct technical vocabulary to discuss their understanding and use of sounds. The teaching of reading has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Pupils now read fluently and with confidence by the time they leave the school.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points. This is because their individual needs are carefully considered and the provision is appropriate for them to progress personally and academically.
- All pupils are helped to be ready for the next stage of their education. Careful transition plans are in place to ensure that pupils start Year 1 confidently. Equally, when older pupils move on to secondary school, leaders are proud that former pupils are used as ambassadors. Pupils make good personal progress.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years provision remains a strength of the school. This is as a result of strong leadership and effective staff who provide suitable learning activities that spark children's interests. As a result, the proportion of children who leave the early years having reached a good level of development is above the national average.
- Many children start in the Reception year having attended the school's own nursery, and in many cases, pre-school provision. In the nursery provision, adults accurately and effectively focus on developing children's social and language skills. Consequently,

children make rapid progress and are ready to start Reception exceptionally well. Parents are rightly very positive about this provision and how well their children settle and are very happy.

- Adults provide a stimulating learning environment with good-quality resources, both in class and outside. Children are often encouraged to choose their own level of challenge so they develop their sense of risk and resilience. A child explained to her classmate that, 'if you choose a tricky challenge, it will help your brain to grow'.
- Children develop confidence in the early years because they are encouraged to demonstrate their independent skills right from the start. They settle into learning swiftly at the start of every school day. They demonstrate a willingness to stick at a task without an adult helping. As a result, children make good progress and are delighted with their achievements.
- Children make good progress across the early years from various and often typical starting points. This year, leaders have identified groups of children such as boys and disadvantaged children who have started school with much less-developed skills than their classmates. Leaders and other staff have undertaken training to try to help these children to catch up. The most able children receive effective help so that they continue to develop their skills further alongside the rest of the class.
- Phonics teaching is integrated into other activities and helps many children to start to read before they move into Reception. Practitioners talk to and question the children effectively to develop their communication skills. This has been a focus and evidence shows that it is proving successful in helping children to learn quickly.
- Children attend the school's own preschool from two years of age. Adults and high-quality resources provide effective support so that children build skills necessary to develop for the start of nursery.
- The early years leader has an accurate view of the strengths and areas for development of the provision. She is always working with staff to look for further improvement.
- Staff ensure children's welfare, health and safety at all times.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 117285 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10036258 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 715 |
| 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 | 6–7 October 2015 |

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Martins Wood is significantly larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are from white British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and who are supported by the pupil premium grant is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is average.
- The school has a pre-school which opened in April 2015.
- The nursery provides education for some children part time and others who attend for 30 hours a week.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum

expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons in all classrooms, many with the headteacher or other members of the senior staff. They also visited assembly, playtime and lunchtime activities.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in all subjects. They heard pupils read and spoke to pupils about their school and their opinions.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff, governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents including: the school's self-evaluation summary; the school development plan; records of governors' meetings and visits; policies; and external reviews of the school's performance.
- Inspectors examined 242 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and held informal discussions with parents who accompanied their children to school. They also considered written responses from parents and the online questionnaire responses from staff and pupils.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
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| Chris Lake | Ofsted Inspector |

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