

Inspection of a good school: St Martin's School

Markland Road, Dover, Kent CT17 9LY

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 February 2024

Outcome

St Martin's School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Helen Thompson. The school is part of Whinless Down Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief executive officer, Kelly Brown, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alison Mackintosh.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere at St Martin's. The school's values are represented by 'happy hippo', 'motivated monkey', 'responsible rabbit', 'respectful rhino' and 'courageous cat'. These traits that these characters embody are clearly demonstrated in the way that pupils approach their learning and the care and kindness they show to each other and adults. Parents appreciate this culture, with one saying, 'The school environment is a very happy one which promotes good behaviour and respect for others.'

Pupils enjoy their learning. There are high expectations for pupils' personal, social and academic achievements and most pupils learn and achieve well. The school is determined that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, will achieve their very best.

Pupils behave well and feel safe and secure. Their well-being is a priority for everyone. Staff know all the pupils and there are positive, trusting relationships. Pupils are rightly confident that the staff will listen to them if they have any concerns or worries, including dealing quickly and fairly with bullying if it should happen.

Pupils have many opportunities to adopt leadership responsibilities, which they take very seriously. These include, for example, 'eco defenders' and members of the school council. Pupils make an active and positive contribution to the school community.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has developed an ambitious curriculum for all pupils. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum carefully. They have successfully taken into account the need to fill gaps in learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and also to meet the needs of an

increasing number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The curriculum is equally ambitious for pupils with SEND and other disadvantaged pupils as it is for all others. The school identifies the needs of pupils accurately. Appropriate adaptations and skilled support ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn, can access the full curriculum and are increasingly achieving well.

The curriculum develops progressively from Reception onwards so that pupils build on what they have learned before. The trust's approach to teaching and learning is effective in this school, ensuring that all children are being taught the right thing at the right time. Teachers check pupils' understanding to inform their subsequent teaching and make adjustments to meet pupils' needs. The recent curriculum revisions are already having a positive impact on pupils' achievement, for example in mathematics and spelling. The school is rightly aware that changes have not yet had time to become fully or consistently embedded, which means that some pupils are yet to achieve as highly as they could overall.

The majority of pupils become confident, fluent readers. Reading has high priority. Reading for enjoyment is promoted successfully throughout the school. Teachers regularly read to pupils and introduce them to a range of good-quality texts. Pupils are encouraged to read widely from a range of increasingly challenging books. Pupils learn phonics skills effectively through a structured and well-delivered programme. It begins as soon as they start in Reception and is built on in Years 1 and 2. Children quickly learn the sounds that letters make and enjoy learning them. They read books that match the sounds that they know. Pupils who are falling behind are given additional help to catch up quickly.

The school is inclusive and all pupils can learn without interruption. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. The school has worked with real determination to successfully improve attendance over time. Pupils' good attendance and behaviour help to make sure that they learn well and develop independence, resilience, stamina and life-long learning skills.

A group of pupils agreed that, 'The school is a place where everyone is welcome and nobody is judged.' This accurately reflects the way in which pupils are kind and respectful of each other and adults. They work together very well. The school provides pupils with many activities to broaden their experiences through clubs, trips, visitors to school and a variety of music and sports events.

The staff are a strong team who are proud and happy to work at the school. The close collaboration of the three schools in the trust is a real strength. There are clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for all staff. The school makes sure that staff, including those at the start of their careers, feel very well supported. Staff appreciate the consideration for their workload and the care for their well-being. Trust leaders and governors know the school well. They work closely with the school to continue to make improvements, providing effective support and challenge.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Recent revisions and refinements to the curriculum have not yet embedded fully. Consequently, some pupils do not yet develop their knowledge and understanding deeply enough. The school should continue to embed its ambitious curriculum to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Martin's School, to be good in March 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	143075
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10296437
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	195
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alison Mackintosh
Headteacher	Helen Thompson
Website	www.stmartins.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 September 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Whinless Down Academy Trust. There are two other local primary schools in the trust.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2021. She was previously the assistant headteacher and special educational needs coordinator in the school.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of the school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and assistant headteacher, subject leaders and many staff.

- The inspector met with the chief executive officer, trustees, including the chair of the board of trustees and the chair of the local governing body.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector also looked at curriculum information in some other subjects on the school and the trust websites.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents including the school's own evaluation of its effectiveness, priorities for improvement, external reviews and information relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The views of staff and pupils were gathered through both formal and informal discussions.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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